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A reasonable faith





Mr. Edmund W. Brown

With kindest regards to
his Old friend the Hon. Secy.

San Rafael
19 Feb. 87.

A REASONABLE FAITH.

A REASONABLE FAITH



*PLAIN SERMONS ON FAMILIAR
CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES*

BY

ARTHUR CROSBY

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SAN RAFAEL, CAL.
MARIN JOURNAL PRINTING HOUSE
1889

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PREFACE.

IN California, skepticism among respectable people is much more outspoken than in the Eastern States.

Good men, whose families are in the church, excellent citizens and neighbors, do not hesitate to express with utmost candor their unbelief in revealed religion. There is very little conventional, or merely formal Christianity here, for there is almost no temptation for a man to conceal his real sentiments if he be an unbeliever.

It is just about as respectable to play lawn tennis, or to go duck-shooting on a Sunday morning, as to go to church. This practical irreligion is generally either the efficient cause or the immediate result of the prevailing skepticism; so that, as a rule, the line is sharply drawn between believers and unbelievers.

The frankness of those who deny the truth of Christianity, although rather startling at first to one accustomed to the greater reserve of Eastern unbelief, is not without its advantages both to the unbeliever himself and to the preacher of the gospel. The unbeliever forms the habit of consistency—of acting as he thinks; so that if he can be brought to think rightly, he is much more likely at once to rectify his conduct. The change in his views will be marked by a definite change in his life.

The preacher has this advantage, that he knows what he has to deal with, and can be outspoken and aggressive. The strongholds he must assail are not masked batteries. The guns of the enemy are in full sight. He will, moreover, very soon discover the fact that the prevalent unbelief is, for the most part, neither very profound nor very obdurate, and to meet it and counteract its influ-

ence, he will find a plain restatement of familiar evidences the most effective method.

Unfortunately, however, the people whom he most desires to reach are seldom in church and, in all probability, will not hear the sermons which he has prepared for their especial benefit.

It is in the hope of meeting, in some measure, this difficulty in my own parish that I risk the publication of these sermons. Perhaps there are some who will read them, who would not come to church and hear them preached. I also venture to hope that they may in some slight degree supply a need in other places.

This hope is not based upon any originality in the arguments; certainly not upon any brilliancy of treatment. The arguments are old, and, to those who have given attention to such matters, familiar. The method of treatment and the style of composition are commonplace.

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Perhaps *therefore* the usefulness of the book will be greater.

What most people need for the confirmation of their faith is not something new, not something brilliant. They simply need to have set before them in unpretentious language the old, well-established arguments for the truth of the Bible and for the Divinity of Christ. And to do this has been my aim in these plain sermons.

It will be seen at once that their purpose is not to answer the more profound metaphysical and scientific objections to Christianity. These are fully answered in the many learned treatises of eminent theologians and philosophers. But for the most part, the works of Christian apologists are too deep, and require too much learning on the part of the reader to be read by busy people of ordinary education.

My intention, in this volume, has been to group together, and to state

in the simplest and most direct English, some of those evidences which have stood the test of time, which have never been answered—simply because they are unanswerable. The last two sermons—those on Sin and on Regeneration—are intended to show the practical effects which should result from a conviction of the truth of revealed religion. They are intended to lead those who intellectually believe to that personal repentance and that heart faith, without which mere belief is of no avail.

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I.

No Mystery---No Faith.

I.

ISAIAH xlv, 15. "*Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.*"

OUR whole existence in this world is involved in mystery. The wisest and most learned of men are profoundly ignorant of many things which come nearest to us. Our birth, our life, our death, our bodies, our minds, our feelings, our nourishment, our growth, our decay, our material and spiritual environment are all deep, unfathomable mysteries. Scientific men explore and investigate. Philosophers reason. Theories are propounded. Systems are constructed, and wise men announce their discoveries and their conclusions to an admiring world. And what does it all amount to? Isaac Newton, the greatest, the wis-

est, as well as the most humble of them all, declared that he was but a little child picking up pebbles on the shore of an infinite ocean. We must confess that all we know of nature and of life—the whole sum of human knowledge, is as nothing compared with what we do not and cannot know.

In whatever direction we turn our curious investigations, we soon come to an impassable barrier, beyond which it is useless for us to try to penetrate. For instance, suppose that like Solomon we desire to know all about the plants and the trees—from the hyssop that is upon the wall, to the cedar that glorifies the slopes of Mt. Lebanon—we proceed to study with careful industry the peculiarities of form, of color, of growth of many thousand specimens. Then we classify and arrange them. We give them names and place each one in its proper order. We discover certain laws of development, and by

fulfilling certain ascertained conditions we can even control to some extent the form and color of the plant. But who knows what the life is which underlies all this? Who has discovered the hidden principle contained in the seed? Who can tell how it is that sun and rain and earth combine with that mysterious germ to produce the green herb, or the flower of the field, or the stately forest tree? Who has succeeded in making, by art and man's device, even the most insignificant growing plant? Here we have reached the barrier, and beyond this limit the youngest infant is as wise as Solomon himself.

So again the anatomist and physiologist have examined the human frame with minute and patient attention, and all the strange and complicated machinery of our bodies, by which we move and walk and eat and sleep—all the wonderfully harmonious relations and interdepend-

encies of these useful organs and members are, or we may believe will be known and described, but here again the limit is reached. The living soul, the thinking mind, the sad or joyful emotion of the heart, the action of the will upon brain and nerve and sinew,—all these, which are the very essentials of man, are mysteries about which the most learned and ingenious can tell us no more than the most ignorant and foolish of men.

The truth is, that on every side of us—above, below, within, without us—in the air we breathe, in the food we eat, in the thoughts we think—in the whole course of life, and in the whole sphere of nature, God is present, working out the wonders of his will; and hence mysteries abound, and human intellect is baffled, and human curiosity is rebuked, and human pride is humbled.

The finite cannot grasp the infin-

ite, and with all our boasted progress we have only learned the first letters of an alphabet, the literature of which fills the universe to its remotest bound—we have but touched the outer hem of the garment with which God is clothed.

Thus, whichever way we turn in search of truth, we are soon confronted by questions which no human wisdom can solve, and which baffle the most careful and painstaking investigation.

Now since this is so; since in the structure of our own bodies and minds—since in all our relations with the material world there is so much that is mysterious and inexplicable—it would be strange indeed if in our relations with our Creator everything were plain and simple and easily understood by our finite intelligence.

While the sciences of nature and of man—the sciences of things visible and tangible—are limited and

imperfect, by reason of the limitation of our powers, we may certainly expect that religion, the science of the supernatural, the science of God, of the invisible and spiritual, will be compassed with difficulties altogether insurmountable by human reason. We may expect to meet with facts which we cannot explain, and which we cannot harmonize in any exact system of thought, or even express in any logical formula of words and phrases. Even with all the light which revelation sheds upon our spiritual conditions and our relations with God—with all the illuminating and guiding influences of the Holy Spirit, with all the instruction afforded by the Christian experience of many generations—there is yet much, very much, of which we are left in utter ignorance. There are many high mysteries which are far above our comprehension, and which we cannot by any means reduce within the scope of finite reasoning.

The alchemists of the middle ages devoted their lives to the discovery of the *philosopher's stone*, which should transmute the baser metals into gold. The modern scientific man, who imagines that he can penetrate nature's secret of the source and origin of life, is the victim of an infatuation quite as irrational. And equally foolish and futile is the labor of those who would explain in the terms of exact science the mysteries of the Divine Being, or construct a logical and consistent system which shall include all the facts regarding sin and salvation.

No doubt the studies and researches of the theologians have great value—so long as they have for their object the clearer knowledge of the word of God; the more vivid illustration of Christian truth; the more impressive arrangement of the facts of religion; the more appropriate defense of the doctrines of the Bible. But when they go beyond all this

and attempt to set forth a complete system of doctrine, and claim for it logical consistency throughout, and the authority of absolute truth; when they attempt to *formulate* divine revelation and pretend to cover the whole ground of theoretical religion with their definitions and statements, then they are going beyond their proper work, and the result is confusion and contradiction.

Take for example the Calvinistic system of theology, as set forth in the Doctrinal Standards of the Presbyterian Church, probably the most logical and consistent ever constructed. Their statements, for the most part, express revealed truth in clear and precise terms, but after all they do not, strictly speaking, present a *system*. It is not a perfect and harmonious whole, and the effort to force dogmas, which are true, into logical agreement within the range of human reasoning, has resulted in some statements which are both unscriptural

and absurd. No doubt, however, systematic theology has its place and its use, when too much is not claimed for it; but we must be careful to acknowledge and emphasize the fact that there are many things about God and religion that we do not know and need not expect to know this side the grave. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."

Now there are many who are checked in their approach to Christianity by this fact of mystery, this unsearchableness of God and divine truth. They want to know all about God before they will believe on Him. They demand that all difficulties shall be removed and all mysteries solved before they will accept Christ as their Savior or take the precepts of the gospel as their guide in life. When you point them to the Lord Jesus Christ as the redeemer of the world, and urge them to believe on Him and be saved—they ask you to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free

will; or else they enter upon a discussion of the origin of evil, or of eternal punishment, or of the nature of the Trinity, or of the atonement, or of the incarnation—and they refuse to go a step toward Christ, in practical trust and love, until these vast and mysterious questions are settled.

But surely this is not wise; it is not reasonable. You do not and could not take up such a position in regard to other matters. There are mysteries everywhere, and to be consistent you should also refuse to think, until it is settled by the scientific authorities just what thought is, and whether it is the cause or the effect of cerebral motion. And you should refuse to eat your daily bread, until you are informed *how* it is that the planted seed breaks forth into new life and produces, “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”

What Christ asks of you is that

you should believe on *Him* as your personal Lord and deliverer—as one who is able and willing to save you from the grasp of your own sin, and from all its evil consequences. He wants you to trust his friendship, and to leave all your highest interests in his care and keeping. And all these puzzling philosophical and theological questions are of secondary importance. If you can arrive at a satisfactory belief concerning them, well and good; but if not, then learn to hold them in abeyance and wait patiently until the Holy Spirit shall lead you into all truth. Meanwhile it is enough if you trust Christ as your Savior, and try to do his will. What I urge is this—Look at the Lord Jesus, study his life in the gospels, examine his character, note his spirit, become familiar with the principles of his teaching, and seeing—believe! Believe on *Him* personally. Never mind the intricacies of theology. Never mind what is

hidden and mysterious. Just believe on Jesus Christ. If you really desire to find the *truth*, you certainly cannot fail to recognize that truth which shines in His life and teachings, therefore unite yourself to Him; surrender yourself to His control; adopt His principles and follow His guidance. This is the kind of faith which the gospel demands. This is what is meant by receiving the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child. Lay aside the pride of intellect. Do not stop to reason out the *how* and the *why* of every question. Do not wait to solve every mystery, but simply cling to Jesus with the trust and love of the heart, and that, because he is so evidently worthy of trust and love. Thus only can we be saved, and thus only can we come to an assured conviction of the higher truths of Revelation.

Let a man walk in the light so far as it shines for him, and it will shine more and more unto the perfect day.

Let him live up to what he does know and his knowledge will surely increase. As Christ says, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."

And besides, as a matter of fact, the principal difficulties at which men stumble, and which they urge as objections to Christianity, are not at all peculiar to Christianity. If you deny Christianity, if you destroy the Bible, if you give up all faith in a personal God, the same puzzling questions remain unanswered. You are no nearer to a solution of the mystery, and you have lost all ground and reason for the exercise of faith.

For example, men object to the doctrine of predestination; they say that it interferes with our free choice, and that they do not see how there can be any justice in punishing men for anything, if all their circumstances and all their acts are predestined by the Creator, so that they cannot help themselves. They refuse to

accept a religion which contains so glaring a contradiction. But, if you think of it, this difficulty is not made by the Bible, nor by Christianity. It belongs to the very nature of things, and cannot be got rid of. It puzzled the ancient heathen philosophers of Greece and Rome, and the shrewdest of modern scientific skeptics has no key to unlock the mystery. If you say there is no God; if you refer all existence and all events to an endless chain of cause and effect, making all the activities of man and of nature but the result of eternal law, you still have predestination, though now it is the predestination of an impersonal, blind, *unmoral* fate, instead of the righteous and intelligent ordering of a personal creator. And you still have the punishment of sin, in the degradation and misery which follow evil-doing—though you may choose to call it by a different name.

So true is it that God's judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past

finding out. How foolish then it is for us to shut our eyes to the light which He has graciously given us in His word, and to reject the truth which we might possess, because we may not know *everything*—because we are not all at once admitted into all the secrets of creation and of Providence.

Our subject has also a practical application to those of us who are Christians—who have accepted the essentials of religion—have taken the Bible for our guide and are trying to live according to the truth as it is in Jesus. Some of us are perhaps tempted to speculate too much about the hidden things of God and so to darken our minds and neglect the plain and simple duties of Christianity.

No doubt there are truths revealed in God's word which can only be discovered and understood by long study and patient investigation, and, it may be, much discussion; but you

and I, who necessarily have our time and our thoughts so largely filled with the practical duties of every day life in the busy world; you and I, who are comparatively ignorant and unlearned, are not called upon to engage in this work. This searching out and discussion of the deep things of Scripture are to be done by men especially fitted for it—men whose education, and training, and circumstances, and intellectual characteristics are calculated to make them wise and skillful and able to discriminate between philosophical truth and error. And then we can take their conclusions and test them by the word of God, and accept or reject them, or hold them in doubt with what intelligence we may possess.

And in this limitation of our ability to understand, or even to form independent opinions, concerning many things in Scripture, there is no hardship, nothing against the

simplicity of religion. All the essential truths of Christianity, all the doctrines which we need for our guidance in the ordinary affairs of life, are written plainly here, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. And whatever is not thus clear and plain on the face of Scripture, whatever high and mysterious things may be found by careful searching here, we can afford to differ about, without bitterness. Or, even if we form no definite and positive opinion concerning them, I suppose that we shall not endanger our souls. It would be pleasant, no doubt, to have all these questions cleared up, once for all, but there is something far more important for us to strive after than the solution of theological puzzles—"Yet show I unto you a more excellent way, * * though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not love, I am nothing." "Follow after love."

In conclusion, as the sum of the whole matter, let us all be more modest in our opinions of God and of religion, not given to profane and vain babblings, which increase to more ungodliness, but in all humility remember that we are weak and fallible in judgment, and that our powers of discernment are extremely limited. There are many things which we do not know, and are not likely to know until death has opened wider the gates of knowledge for us.

But, blessed be God, there are some glorious things which we do know—“*We know* that all things work together for good to them that love God”—so that we need not be greatly disturbed by any of the vicissitudes of life; and “*We know* that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens”—so that we need fear no disaster in the approach of death. And “*We know* that when

He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"—so that a glorious and sinless future is in store for us. And then, as inclusive of all joy and peace, as containing everything that our hearts could desire, "*We are persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Having all these *certainties*, rejoicing in the possession of these priceless truths, surely we can be content to wait until our powers are developed in a better world, until the light of God's presence shall fill us with spiritual illumination—we can wait God's own time, to be led into all truth, and to know even as we are known.

II.

A Message from Heaven.

II.

PSALM cxix, 105. *“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”*

IN attempting to answer the question, Is the Bible a Message from Heaven? I shall assume the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. I take for granted that there is a Supreme Being, all powerful, all wise, who made the heavens and the earth, who upholds and governs the universe, and that what we call Nature and the Laws of Nature are God's methods of working out His will through and upon His creatures.

And I take for granted, that man is immortal, that he has an invisible, undying soul, and that he was made to know and love and serve his Maker. His true, ideal life can only be developed through intercourse

and communion with God. The things which begin, continue and end within the brief period of his existence on the earth—things which belong to his body and bodily comfort—cannot meet the wants of his higher nature or satisfy the longings and aspirations of his soul. God and truth and love, things unseen and eternal, can alone supply his deepest needs. As Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

To those who deny these fundamental truths, the following argument has no force or value. If, however, we do believe in a personal God and in our own immortality, then, indeed, it is no difficult matter to show that our faith in the Bible as a message from Heaven is a Reasonable Faith.

For the sake of convenience, let us divide the subject in this way—first, Has God given a supernatural

revelation to men? and, secondly, If He has done so, is the Bible that divine, supernatural revelation? Let us take up these questions separately: And, first, Has God given man a supernatural revelation of Himself and His will? I answer that the need for such a revelation would seem to indicate that it would be given. If it be true that men can only reach their true destiny by knowing God and doing His will, how necessary it is that God should in some way make Himself and His will known to us?

If we turn to nature for light and instruction, we can indeed learn much of the power and wisdom of the Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," but of love and mercy, of righteousness and duty, nature teaches us little or nothing. When we question her in regard to these things; when we inquire concerning the disposition

of the Almighty toward us; when we seek information about our relations to Him, and the duty He requires of us, the answers which nature gives are confused and enigmatical, like the answers of the old heathen oracles, which might mean one thing or the opposite thing, according to the wishes and prejudices of the questioner.

Do you ask nature whether God regards us with love, or hatred, or indifference? As you gaze with admiration upon the full-laden yellow wheat, bending gracefully in the summer breeze, or yielding its rich store to the husbandman; or, as you watch the silent, changeful beauty of earth and sky, when the sun is going down beyond distant hills; or, as you think of fragrant flowers, and luscious fruits, and abundant harvests—of all the beautiful and beneficent things which nature provides—then indeed it does seem as if she proclaimed with clear voice, in un-

mistakable tones, the great truth that *God is Love*.

But now, when we turn from these suggestions of peace and comfort; when we regard the loathsome vermin, the poisonous reptile, the fierce wild beast; when we look upon nature in her wild, destructive moods—in the tempest, driving the mariner upon a rocky coast; in the earthquake, destroying man and his works; in the avalanche, sweeping away without mercy whole villages of Alpine peasants; or when we think of what nature can do in her times of bitterness and hard cruelty—when the pestilence desolates the happiest homes; or when the heavens withhold the early and the latter rains, and the husbandman's toil is of no avail, and the earth refuses to bring forth her increase and famine comes among the people—then nature appears to contradict herself, and we read upon her stern countenance nothing of our Maker's love; but as

she frowns upon us, she seems to utter the awful message—God is *hate*.

So, again, if we inquire of nature whether God is just and righteous in his judgments, the answer is confused, uncertain, contradictory to our ears. We see indeed, oftentimes, the working out of evil consequences to those who sin; and we see certain virtues rewarded with health and plenty; but again we look, and behold—the innocent are suffering with the guilty, or the wicked are prospering in the world, while the good man is in misery and want.

But if external nature gives us no clear rule of life, no definite information of God and of His dealings with us, may we not learn all that is needful for us to know from the light of reason, and the law written within on the heart and conscience?

No doubt much is given here; God has placed a witness of Himself in every breast. There *is* a law written

on the heart. The conscience is a divine voice—the thoughts do accuse or else excuse each other. Ideas of sin and of justice rise intuitively in the mind, and in the honest search for truth many things come to light which reveal something of the nature and of the will of God.

But how dim and confused are the notions thus obtained, and how unavailing they are to bring peace to the troubled soul. When the conscience accuses of sin, and dark misgivings arise about the future, and the heart trembles in fear of divine wrath, what can reason tell you of forgiveness and cleansing? And amid the various different theories of life and duty; amid all the conflicting views of man's obligations and of his destiny, how is the soul to find certainty and rest?

No; the world by wisdom cannot know God. And no philosopher has ever been wise enough to construct a scheme of deliverance from the

power of sin that has any permanent practical value.

What then? Is it possible that God has left us to the guidance of these flickering lights and inarticulate voices? With this great need crying in our souls; with this pressing necessity to know our Maker and to know His will, has He left us to wander in darkness and perish in ignorance? Will He never definitely and clearly speak to man and harmonize the seemingly contradictory revelations of nature? Will he never point out the path by which the race may arrive at a higher and nobler state of existence?

These are questions which rise in the human mind in all ages, and the instinctive answer which the universal human heart gives to them is, that there *is*, that there *must be* such a direct supernatural revelation.

It is this natural and universal expectation of a definite and positive communication from Heaven that

has led men to put faith in magicians and astrologers and soothsayers. It was this that gave the Oracles of Greece their influence in the ancient world. It is this instinctive belief—this belief that the Heavens are not brass—this belief that God will send a message to His intelligent creatures—it is this that accounts for all heathen religions, with their fetiches and sacrifices, their altars and priests; and it is this that in Christian lands leads people who deny the Bible to believe in dreams and omens, and to resort to clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers and spiritual mediums.

Now, when we find a belief universal, in all ages and among all races of men, we may be sure that it points to some fact of vast and universal interest. This is one of the great arguments for the being of God. Men may and do differ as to the nature of God, but that there is a God, all tribes and generations of the

human race have asserted. Now, if there is no fact to correspond to this idea, where did the idea come from? How does it happen that the Bushmen of Africa, and the Esquimaux of Labrador, and the most enlightened nations of Europe and America all agree in the firm, unshakable belief that there is a God? We feel that the only explanation of this universal belief is to be found in its truth.

And in the same way, the fact that the belief in revelation is universal is strong evidence that there is a revelation.

But if it be conceded that there is nothing incredible in the fact of a supernatural revelation; that the Creator can, if He chooses, communicate His will to His creatures; and if it be still further admitted that the great need and the universal expectation of such a message make it, to say the least, highly probable that He has done so; then our second question

remains—"Is the Bible that Message?" Is it indeed, and no other, the Word of God? How do we know that its contents were revealed from Heaven? May we not find a divine message in other books which claim to be inspired?

These are certainly fair questions—questions which it is well to ask, and which should be thoughtfully considered and carefully answered.

No intelligent Christian need be afraid to examine the foundations of his faith. If there is no good reason for accepting the Bible, then every honest man ought to reject it. If its claims to be the Word of God are not well founded, then it is folly to take it for our guide, or to build any hope upon its promises.

Without attempting any elaborate or exhaustive argument to prove the divine origin of the scriptures, I wish simply to call attention to two facts which point that way, and I beg of you to follow out, in your own minds,

the line of thought which they suggest.

The first fact is, that the Bible touches upon and covers the very points which we most need to know, and which we would naturally expect a divine revelation to contain.

We have spoken of universal ideas, as indicating that there must be some corresponding reality of immense importance to all men. But we also noticed that these universal ideas are of the most general and indefinite character, and never include those particulars and details which, for our eternal well-being, it is essential that we should know. Now, if there be a supernatural revelation at all, is it not certain that it will give us just those particulars—that, indeed, the filling out of these universal ideas, which are of such surpassing interest to us, will be the one grand design of a message from Heaven?

Thus the idea of God is universal; but who is God? What are His attri-

butes? What is His disposition towards us? Does He love His creatures, or hate them? Does He regard us as a father regards his children, or as a taskmaster regards his slaves, or is He altogether indifferent to our welfare? How can we approach Him? With what rites should He be worshipped?

To these questions, nature and reason, which give us the bare idea of God, can yield no answer. But, surely, if there be a *super-natural* revelation, we shall find the answer there. Surely the first thing we would look for in a message from Heaven would be some definite information on these important points.

Again, the idea of right and wrong is a universal idea. All men, the world over, make a distinction in morals. No tribe of men has yet been discovered, however ignorant and degraded, that does not consider some acts right and others wrong. Yet while all, without exception,

recognize the distinction, they differ widely as to its application, because nature gives us no sure standard, no rule of righteousness; so that the Hindoo mother thinks it right to throw her babe into the Ganges river; and the Thugs of India regard murder as a noble and praiseworthy act; and the American Indian is troubled in conscience and convicted of sin, if he has no human scalps to hang upon his belt. In some lands, lying is a virtue, and the best liar is the worthiest man; and in others, the expert thief is the most highly regarded.

Nor are these confusions and contradictions to be found only among the ignorant and superstitious, but even the wisest and most enlightened ethical teachers, who have had only the light of nature to guide them, have come far short of any consistent and universal standard of morals. Aristotle, and Cicero, and Socrates, and Gautama, and Confucius, the

names which represent the highest attainments of the natural man, are fatally inconsistent, not only with each other, but each with himself. In all their moral systems, true and important principles are omitted, while false or puerile ones are given a prominent place.

Thus, while nature reveals to us the fact that there is a difference between right and wrong, she does not enable us to know the right from the wrong. And yet it is surely of vital importance to us to obtain this knowledge, and, therefore, is it not certain that a message from Heaven, if there be such, will contain the instruction we need upon this point?

A third universal idea is that of a future state of rewards and punishments. This idea is closely related to the one we have just considered, and is as universal as that. Having the idea of sin, men have the idea of retribution. There is an expectation of a coming judgment, which pre-

vails everywhere, and always has prevailed among men.

Yet how to escape misery, and how to secure happiness in the life to come; how to get rid of sin, and how to avoid its consequences; what we must do to be saved—upon all this nature throws no clear light; and so we see men resorting to all sorts of absurd rites and ceremonies to placate the offended deity, to induce him to put away his displeasure; and sacrifices are offered, and penances are performed, and praying machines are turned, for the purpose of quieting the conscience and getting rid of the oppressive burden of sin.

So, too, plans are proposed by wise men and philosophers for overcoming the power of sin and purifying society by means of education, or legal enactment, or social reformation. But sin remains, and the sense of guilt and ill-desert remains, and the burden of a dark foreboding

presses upon the soul. Nature, while revealing the fact of sin, provides no remedy, brings no relief.

Can we doubt, then, that if our Maker shall see fit to give us any supernatural revelation, it will have much to say of salvation from sin? Will it not be sure to teach us how to obtain righteousness? Will it not bring life and immortality to light, and point out the path by which we can escape from the power of evil, and secure personal holiness and everlasting life?

Is not this a true account of what we need—of what we have a right to expect in a supernatural revelation, if we have one at all? And now, as a matter of fact, it is just upon these three great subjects, in which all men are by nature deeply interested, that the Bible discourses. From beginning to end its themes are GOD, and MORALITY and SALVATION.

The Bible assumes the reality, the

truth, of these universal ideas, and then proceeds to fill them out in all necessary details. Here we are told all about God that we need to know. And what a representation it is—glorious majesty, unfailing wisdom, incorruptible justice, fatherly love, tender pity. Such is the God of the Bible—a being of infinite perfections. Here, also, are laid down universal principles of morality; principles which are summed up in the comprehensive law, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself,”—a law which can be applied as a rule of conduct in all conceivable circumstances and under all imaginable conditions. And above all, here is revealed ONE who is not only in His own life a perfect illustration of this perfect law, but is also declared to be a competent deliverer from the power of sin, and a mediator between God and man, able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

Thus we find in the Bible an answer to the most anxious questionings of the soul. We find information concerning the very things of which we would expect a message from Heaven to inform us. This is the first fact which seems to vindicate the claim of the Bible to be divinely inspired.

The second fact is this: That the acceptance of the Bible as divine, and careful obedience to its precepts, lead to the very best results in human society.

Error and falsehood, the world over and in all human experience, inevitably work misery and degradation. False principles of life, systems founded upon lies and deceit, must lead to darkness and death. And certainly if the Bible be a lie; if its answers to our questions are false; if it is a mere human invention, while claiming to be a revelation from Heaven—such a stupendous lie, touching, as it does, such vital

points, must result in confusion worse confounded to all who are deceived by it.

But this is not the effect of faith in the Bible. On the contrary, we see that men are made better and nobler and purer, and more intelligent, and more useful, and more loving, just in proportion to the heartiness with which they accept this book, and the consistency with which they make it the rule and guide of their life. And we see that society becomes enlightened and moral and prosperous, just in proportion as the Bible and the teachings of the Bible are honored and obeyed. Is it probable that such results would follow from the propagation of a fraud and a lie?

To sum up: We find a pressing necessity in the nature and condition of men for a supernatural, divine revelation, or message from Heaven. And we find also a universal expectation of and belief in the reality of

such a message. Then, when we come to examine the Bible, we find it dealing with and answering the very questions which men, by nature, are led to ask most urgently. And we find that wherever those answers which the Bible gives are accepted as true and divine, and are consistently acted upon, there the purest morality, the clearest light, and the highest freedom prevail. But how can we account for all this, unless the Bible is what it claims to be, a message from Heaven?

Is it reasonable to suppose that any merely human production could effect all this? What other book is like it? What could take its place? Surely the Bible alone is God's word. It is Our Father's Message to His children. It is a treasure above all earthly wealth—a treasure inexhaustible. Indeed, the more we use it, the richer it grows, and in its deep mines of precious truth, we may dig and search all our lives, and every

day find something new for our comfort or our instruction.

III.

The Everlasting Kingdom.

III.

HEB. xii, 28. *“Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”*

THE history and triumphs of the Christian Church indicate its divine origin and spiritual vitality.

The proposition is not that because the church is a great and successful institution, therefore it is of God. We all know that mere earthly success is no proof of the divinity of Christianity. Whether a religion is of God, or of the devil, cannot be decided by a majority vote. But the character, the quality of the success which a religion achieves does go far toward indicating its truth and its value.

The kind of obstacles it has surmounted; the nature of the difficul-

ties it has encountered and overcome; the general effect upon mankind of its real triumphs, and the methods by which these triumphs have been won, will necessarily influence our judgment of its claims. Let us, then, rapidly review the history of the church, and the accepted facts of that history will vindicate to every candid mind the assertion that the Christian Church is the Church of the Living God.

In the text, as in many other places in the New Testament, the church is spoken of as a Kingdom. But this idea of a Kingdom of God, a Heavenly Kingdom in the earth, did not by any means originate with the Christian dispensation, or in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This radiant conception of a sublime monarchy, universal, divine; of an all-powerful king reigning among men in righteousness and love, is interwoven in all the texture of sacred history and of prophecy.

The ancient Jewish theocracy, and, later, the Throne of David, were but types and fore-shadowings of the imperishable, human-divine power yet to come. Through long generations devout and godly men, wearied with the confusions of earth, had hoped and prayed for the establishment of this promised Kingdom, and had anxiously looked for its appearing. Abraham foresaw it and was glad. David, in his inimitable lyrics, had sung of its glories. Isaiah, in ringing tones, had declared that it would surely come. Jeremiah had consoled himself and the faithful of his time, in the midst of the miseries and injustice to which they were exposed, with the same hope—"A King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the Earth." Micah had told of its glory and its extent, and Daniel had explicitly declared: "The God of Heaven shall set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed; it

shall stand forever." Nay, he had gone further, and shown that the "Lord's saints" were to constitute this Kingdom, and that one like the Son of Man was to reign in it. And, finally, the immediate herald and fore-runner of the King himself appeared, and John the Baptist announced, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Thus, in proclaiming the establishment of a Kingdom, Jesus and His Apostles introduced no new and strange idea, but simply declared the actual fulfillment of the types and prophecies of many centuries.

But the special point in regard to this Kingdom which I would emphasize, is that characteristic of it which is mentioned in the text—namely, that it "cannot be moved."

This Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom. Earthly thrones arise and disappear. Earthly powers decay. The great monarchies of former days have passed utterly away. The pride

and pomp of the mightiest princes cannot long withstand the destructive influences that sooner or later are sure to undermine every earthly thing; but the Kingdom which Christ established endureth forever. The external form of the Kingdom may change; the superficial additions which men have made may be swept away; but the Kingdom itself, its King, its laws, its principles are unchangeable and indestructible. The heathen have raged against it. The kings of the earth have set themselves, and the rulers have taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, and yet, unmoved amid all storms, unshaken by the fiercest assaults, the Kingdom of God has continued, its power ever increasing, and its conquests extending on every side.

I. At first the Jews, with bitter hatred and fanatical zeal, tried to strangle it at its birth; and then, immediately, the mighty power of

pagan Rome was brought to bear against it. Yet, although persecuted and well nigh crushed, though ravaged with fire and sword, the infant church, without the aid of earthly arms, steadily advanced, until pagan Rome became Christian Rome, and the Emperor himself was proud to be called the "Defender of the Faith."

Later on, assailed by the wild, barbarous tribes of the heathen north, the fierce and cruel worshippers of Woden and Thor, its apparent overthrow was changed into sublime triumph, as the victorious Gothic hordes, who had overcome the legions of Rome and seized the very throne, submitted in turn to the all-conquering power of Christian truth, and the Kingdom of God extended its boundaries to the northern shores of Europe.

The Mohammedan powers of Asia next armed themselves against the Kingdom, and, for awhile, it seemed

as if the Cross must yield to the Crescent. Slaying without mercy all who opposed them, and treating with the utmost cruelty those who would not abjure Christianity and accept the false Prophet, they penetrated to the very heart of Christian Europe, and held possession of some of the fairest lands and some of the richest cities on the continent. But the tide was rolled back, and now all men can see that Islamism has had its day; its glory and its terror have departed, and the vast Turkish empire, which has so long embodied and maintained its principles, is rapidly crumbling to pieces under the silent but mighty influences which the Kingdom of God is exercising in the affairs of men.

II. But this Kingdom has proved its stability by withstanding other assailants no less vindictive, no less powerful than these. From the very first the "wisdom of this world" has arrayed itself against "the truth,"

and from one generation to another has renewed its attacks upon the Kingdom of Heaven.

As early as the days of Paul and John, and for many years after, the different sects of Gnostic and Manichæan philosophers, with their strange combination of Paganism, Judaism, and Christian mysticism, led astray many foolish souls, and, at length, even in the church itself, absurd and mystical errors threatened to supplant the pure teaching of Scripture and to destroy the holy power of Christ's kingdom of truth. But neo-platonism is a thing of the past. Gnosticism no longer endangers the integrity of Christian doctrine. The Manichæans exist as but a name in history, while the Word of the Lord, the Kingdom of Heaven, endureth, and shall endure forever.

Again, in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the world had awakened from the profound sleep of the dark ages; when learning be-

gan to prevail in Europe, and the ancient classics were studied, and art and poetry were revived, men thought that they could do without Christianity—that they had found a new and better way. The old truths were laughed at, as foolish fables, and the world's wisdom declared that the sweetness and light, the beauty and strength contained in the literature of Greece and Rome were sufficient for the regeneration of men, and that now Christianity, with other superstitions, must disappear, and the Kingdom of Heaven be dismissed as one of the great infatuations of the race, of which men, with their new enlightenment, ought to be ashamed.

In the eighteenth century the grave and earnest Deism of such men as Hume, in England, and Lessing, in Germany, set itself to overthrow the Kingdom by argument and philosophy, while the shallow and frivolous materialism of Bolingbroke and Vol-

taire and Tom Paine sought its destruction by wit and ridicule.

But in less than a hundred years the enemies of the Kingdom had taken up a new position, and were making their attacks on a different ground; and then serious and reverential skepticism became fashionable, and the sentimentalism of Renan, with its fascinating beauty of style, was brought forward as the complete refutation of Christian theology, and many weak minds were turned from the truth.

And now, in these last days, come the apostles of science. Carried away with the conceit of their discoveries in the realms of natural law; puffed up by the success of their investigations; blinded by their exclusive devotion to material things, they declare, with great flourish of trumpets, that to them, at length, the Kingdom of Heaven must yield, and scientific culture must be accepted as a substitute for Christian-

ity, for securing the progress and salvation of humanity.

But, above nature is the supernatural; beyond the material is the spiritual; beyond the world and the stars is God; and there is no more possibility that the scientific infidelity of to-day will prevail, than that Hell will conquer Heaven. The Kingdom of God is an everlasting Kingdom, and true science can only help to strengthen its foundations, and to extend its boundaries. We hear much talk of the conflict between science and religion. There is no such conflict. The man of science may contend against the Bible; and the ecclesiastic may protest against giving attention to scientific facts; and so between these two men there may be conflict. But the scientist is not science, and the ecclesiastic is not religion, and between these two there is the absolute harmony of their common source,

Let science, then, pursue her in-

vestigations, and we will bid her God-speed. Let her bring forth all light, and all knowledge, and read to us all the record of the rocks and of the stars, and she will but build up the Kingdom of God. True science is the handmaid of religion, and every *fact* is in exact and beautiful harmony with the doctrines of Christianity.

Believing, as we do, that the Kingdom of God not only includes the past and the present, but is destined with ever-widening influence to embrace the unfolding future, we expect, with full assurance, that all true discoveries which men may make, in the earth or in the heavens, will only help to glorify our King, and to justify our faith in Jesus as "Lord over all, blessed forever."

III. But besides having survived the persecution, and overcome the opposition of earthly rulers and kingdoms; besides having withstood the more subtle assaults of vain

philosophy and "science, falsely so called," the Kingdom of God has manifested its vitality and given assurance of its permanence, by purging itself of the corruptions and errors which have at times threatened to eat out its life, and utterly to destroy its influence in the world. This is the strongest and most convincing proof of durability. The power of self-reformation indicates a real vitality.

Before the time of Martin Luther, the church had sunk to the lowest depths of depravity. The light of truth had become very dim; the fragrance of virtue very faint. Morality and religion were most unnaturally divorced.

Open, shameless licentiousness, and cruelty and dishonesty prevailed everywhere. The Popes were tyrants and murderers; the cardinals were libertines and intriguers; the bishops lived in luxurious, sinful pleasure; the priests were idle, vic-

ious, good-for-nothing; the people, corrupted by the public sale of indulgences for all sorts of sins, degraded by the wretched idolatry to which their religion had degenerated, and led on by the example of their spiritual shepherds, were superstitious, depraved, immoral. Indeed, the Kingdom of God had apparently become the corrupter of mankind.

Has, then, this Kingdom proved itself a failure? Are its claims false? Is it unequal to the task assigned it? And must it now be swept away to make room for some new instrument for the help of poor humanity? Or, if it be possible to restore it to its original purity and make it effective for good, is it necessary that the Almighty should bring to bear upon it, from without, some unique, miraculous energy?

No; it is still the Kingdom of God. Nor has it ever been deserted by its King; and, beneath all the corruption, and superstition, and ignorance

of those sad times, vital forces are at work—vital forces which are inherent in the very essence of the Kingdom. Silently the truth is winning its way in many humble souls; until, presently, from the very heart of the church, the light shines forth, and a clear, strong voice is heard asserting the supremacy of Jesus Christ and declaring the true principles of his Kingdom.

And so the Reformation began; and righteousness and truth and the pure worship of God were once more established among men—not by the application of any new force; not by any external pressure; but by the revival of that immortal divine energy already and always in the Kingdom itself.

Thus, also, in the last century, when worldliness and loose morals, indifference and skepticism abounded in the church; when the Christian religion seemed to be little more than a dry theology, with no

practical bearing on the daily life of those who professed and called themselves Christians; when the influence of the Kingdom of God in the affairs of men could scarcely be discerned; then it was that from out the bosom of the apparently lifeless church came Whitefield, Romaine, Toplady and Wesley, asserting and proving the undying vital power of Christian truth. And, in consequence, the slave trade was overthrown, prisons were reformed, Sunday-schools were established, Bible societies were organized, missionaries were sent to all parts of the world: all the forms of modern Christian activity, which have accomplished such wonders, were brought into being; and Christianity became again a real force in the world. And all this was the result, not of the preaching of any new truth, not of the introduction of any new and unknown element into the Kingdom of God:

it followed naturally and necessarily upon the reassertion of the same old truths and principles upon which the Kingdom was founded, and which have constituted its real essence throughout all the ages.

Thus, the Kingdom of God has conquered every foe—surmounted every obstacle. Hostile armies, intellectual power, internal corruption, have been unable to withstand its glorious progress. Mighty, irresistible, indestructible, it has advanced, “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners,” until to-day its crucified King, the peasant of Galilee, wields an authority and exercises an influence over mankind far greater and more extensive than any earthly ruler ever dreamed of.

Have we not, then, every reason to believe the word of prophecy, and to expect confidently the “sounding of the seventh angel,” and the “great voices in Heaven saying: The king-

doms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever”?

Surely we have received “a Kingdom which cannot be moved.” We are the subjects of a King whose throne is everlasting.

Amid all discouragements, under all adverse circumstances; confused, blinded, perplexed, it may be, in the tumult of this evil world, and by the smoke and dust of the mighty battle with the powers of darkness, let us still keep our faith firm in this great truth; and with undaunted courage and high hope and unshaken confidence in the King of Kings, join in the Psalmist’s triumphant cry, “The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice!” Let us be faithful, loyal subjects, serving our King “acceptably, with reverence and godly fear,” that we may share in those glorious victories of His Kingdom with which all the future is crowded.

IV.

What Think Ye of Christ?

IV.

JOHN i, 14. *"And the Word was made (became) flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."*

MATTHEW begins his gospel by tracing the human genealogy of Our Lord to Abraham, the father of the Jews, showing that He was the son of David, the long-promised Messiah. Mark begins with a reference to the prophets and then immediately introduces John the Baptist as the fore-runner of Christ; and Jesus himself at once appears, a full-grown man, to be baptized in the Jordan. Luke, beginning with the annunciation to Zacharias, proceeds in a series of exquisite lyrics, to give the circumstances connected with the conception and birth of the holy babe, and when he comes to the genealogy,

he traces it back to Adam, and thus connects Jesus with the whole race and shows that he is indeed the Son of Man. While the gospel written by John begins the wonderful story, not in time, but in eternity, in that immeasurably remote period before the foundation of the world, or ever the sun and the stars had any being.

When we take up the Old Testament and read the first verse, the opening sentence of Revelation—“*In the beginning* God created the heavens and the earth,” the mind is carried back over the long centuries of human history—through the dim ages of prehistoric times—back to those vast eras of geologic transformation, during which the earth was being prepared, slowly and painfully, with great throes and upheavals, for the habitation of man—still further back, through untold myriads of years to that mysterious time when the earth was “without form and void, and darkness was upon

the face of the deep;" nor yet is *the beginning* reached, for who can say that this same earth had not already existed for countless ages, and through many various changes of form and use, before it was reduced to this chaotic condition? At last, wearied with the effort to reduce the infinite to our finite measurement of time, the mind rests in the eternal and uncreated existence of God.

There we find the beginning of the world, and there we must find the beginning of thought. And now when we turn to the first sentences of John's gospel, we learn what is the true starting point of Christianity. It does not begin with the birth in Bethlehem; nor with the preaching of John the Baptist; nor with the inspired utterances of Messianic prophets; nor with Abraham; nor yet with Adam, but Christianity begins *in the beginning*. It begins with God.

For when Jesus was conceived by

the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, THE WORD became flesh, and, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*"

So it was that the Eternal Word, the Almighty Creator, the Fountain of Light and the Source of Life, submitted Himself to the limitations of humanity. Not regarding His equality with God a thing to be grasped, He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And thus, as we look upon the smiling infant cradled in Mary's arms; as we listen to the boy talking so wisely with the doctors in the temple; as we think of the young carpenter, working at his father's bench in Nazareth; as we follow the weary

footsteps of the "man of sorrows" by the shores of the Galilean lake, over the hill-sides of Judæa, or through Jerusalem's busy streets; or as we stand and gaze upon the Crucified, lifted up that He might draw all men unto Him, we are contemplating, not merely a superior man, not simply an inspired prophet, not even the first of created beings, but the Creator Himself—God manifest in the flesh.

This is the great mystery of the Incarnation, a mystery, profound and unfathomable, the most amazing of all miracles, appealing, not to the senses, but to faith; not made known to us by the testimony of men; not discovered by the investigations of reason, but revealed from Heaven, and proved to our faith by the character of Him who declares Himself to be the Son of God.

At the very outset we admit that the Incarnation is incomprehensible, that it cannot be explained, that the

human mind cannot understand it. How the Word could become flesh; how Jesus could be perfect man and at the same time perfect God, we do not and cannot know. And all the fine-spun, subtle arguments, and hair-splitting definitions of philosophers and theologians cannot solve the mystery—are apt, indeed, to confuse the mind and to destroy the simplicity of faith.

Let us, therefore, rather look with earnest attention upon Jesus Himself, as He stands before us scarred with the wounds of His crucifixion. Let us devoutly listen to the words which fall from His lips, and so our doubts will be silenced and we shall exclaim, as Thomas did, “My Lord and my God.”

But there are those whose faith is staggered by the greatness of the mystery. Because they cannot understand the Incarnation, because they cannot explain it, they will not believe it. But surely that is no

reason for unbelief. Can you understand God? And will you therefore deny that there is a God? Can you explain the universe and how it came into being? And will you therefore refuse to believe in the existence of matter? Nay; are not you yourself an incomprehensible mystery? Whence came your immaterial mind? How does it act through and upon your material body? What is thought? What are love and hope and anger and desire? Can you fathom the depths of human nature, or analyze the soul of man? And will you therefore say that there is no mind, that there is no soul?

But if God is a mystery, and the world is a mystery, and if humanity itself is a mystery, then should we not expect that God coming into the world, God "made in the likeness of men," would be of all mysteries the most profound and inexplicable? And why should we refuse to believe

in the God-man, because we cannot understand Him, any more than we refuse to believe in God because we cannot understand *Him*, or any more than we refuse to believe in man because we cannot understand him?

Nor is this mystery one to which the human mind has any natural or necessary aversion. On the contrary, the idea of the Incarnation of the Deity is prominent in almost all the heathen mythologies, and we trace its partial and often grotesque development in the false religions of many widely separated races. The Greeks and Romans attributed human and even brutal features and characteristics to their gods. And Jupiter and Mercury and a host of other deities often walked the earth and took part in the affairs of men. The Hindoo believes that already his great god Vishnu has been nine times incarnate, and that yet there is to be a tenth incarnation of that deity, when all the workers of in-

iquity shall be destroyed. While in the religious myths of the ancient Toltec inhabitants of Mexico we even find the story of a *miraculous conception and birth* of their supreme god; born, however, not as a babe, but as a mighty warrior, full grown and completely armed.

All these confused suggestions of the incarnation, weak, foolish, contradictory as they are, yet indicate the longing of the human mind for intercourse with God, and the deep, though vague, conviction that God may and does condescend to man's estate, in order that that intercourse may be secured. And when we turn to the Bible account of the origin of man, and of his relation to God, we see how natural this longing is.

Here we learn that man is the offspring of God; that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and so made him in His own image. And although fallen and depraved through sin, although separated by

disobedience and rebellion from his Father, man still has a glimmering perception of his divine kinship, and feels with vague instinctive yearning after God.

And here, too, in this account of the creation of man we find the *natural* ground or basis of that Incarnation which is the glory of our Christian faith. Being made in the divine image, and endowed with God-like faculties, his life the very in-breathing of God, man was designed and prepared from the first, by the original structure of his soul, for union with his Maker. A union which finds its complete realization in the God-man, Christ Jesus.

Let us look at this divine-human person, as He appears in the gospels. Let us hearken with reverence to what He says of Himself, and so confirm our faith in the Incarnate God and justify that large hope which every Christian may cherish, and which makes his future bright

with a glory like unto that of his Lord.

The historical Jesus is now universally acknowledged. No scholar is found reckless enough to deny that the main features of the gospel history are true. However bitterly or however sadly the skeptic may refuse to accept the supernatural and the divine in Jesus of Nazareth, he is compelled to admit Jesus Himself to a place in history. The footprints of the Galilean prophet are so deep, so plain and distinct, even to this day, that the very blindness of unbelief cannot refuse to see them.

As Simeon held the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple, he declared that the child was set for a sign that should be spoken against. And so, indeed, He has been a sign from that day to this. He is a sign to which the eyes of men are ever turned, whether they will or no. He may be spoken against, He may

be reviled, He may be insulted, He may be patronized, He may be rejected, but He cannot be ignored. There He stands, compelling the attention of mankind, and forcing upon all minds the question, "What think ye of Christ?"

The *man* is and must be acknowledged, even though the *God* be denied. "Ecce Homo!" cries modern unbelief, and glorifies the ideal humanity of Jesus; but when we would add "Ecce Deus!" it turns away in pity or in scorn at our superstition. Yet Jesus Himself, this *ideal* man, claims for Himself, in unmistakable language, all that we claim for Him.

To the multitude at Jerusalem He declares, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work," and when the Jews naturally accept this as an assumption of equality with God, He does not rebuke them, or charge them with misrepresenting or misunderstanding Him. On the con-

trary, He confirms their interpretation of His words by insisting that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father.

A little later in His ministry He stands in the very court of the temple of God and declares "Before Abraham was I AM," which was such an unequivocal claim to Godhood that the people immediately rushed upon Him to stone Him for blasphemy. Not long after, in the same place, He calmly asserts, "I and my Father are one."

On the night before His crucifixion He tells His disciples, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So, also, when He is arraigned before the Supreme Court of the Jews on the charge of blasphemy, in that He had made Himself equal with God, He enters no denial; He admits the facts, and rests His defense upon the truth of His claim, which He now reiterates in the presence of His judges, "Hereafter shall ye see the

Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of Heaven." But His judges would not admit that His claim was true, and so He was crucified, and from *their* standpoint rightfully convicted of blasphemy.

But even these direct and explicit assertions of divinity are not so startling as His quiet assumption of divine prerogatives. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount, He represents Himself as the supreme arbiter of man's destiny—"Many will say unto *me* in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name * * and then I will profess unto them—I never knew you; depart from *me* ye that work iniquity."

In the nineteenth chapter of Matthew He speaks of Himself as sitting upon the *throne* of His *glory*, thus, in effect, claiming to be the King of Glory. And, in the highly dramatic account of the last judgment, in the same gospel, it is *He*,

Jesus, the Son of Man, that shall come "in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him." It is *He* that shall sit upon the throne as universal monarch, and *His* lips shall pronounce sentence upon the assembled nations.

So moreover, not once or twice, but many times, consistently throughout His ministry, He presents Himself as the source of life, the only dependence of the soul, the complete satisfaction for all human need, for eternity as well as for time: "Come unto *me* and I will give you rest." "I am the bread of life." "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven; if any man eat of this bread He shall live forever." "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Now, all this and much more that might be quoted from the words of Jesus, make it perfectly plain that He Himself, at all events, claimed to be God Incarnate. And in view

of the fact that Jesus makes this claim, we are shut up to one of three alternatives in our estimate of Him. Either (1) He was an impostor, intentionally and wickedly deceiving the people; or (2) He was a self-deceived, visionary enthusiast, so weak minded and fanatical as to believe not only that he was a god, but that he was God; or else (3) He was indeed what He claimed to be, and has a right to all that we ascribe to Him when we adore and worship Him as our Supreme Lord and Everlasting King.

Let us look at the first of these alternatives: Can it be that Jesus was an impostor? Is it conceivable that He purposely deceived His disciples, and deliberately misled those who trusted in Him, and pretended to powers which He did not possess? Is it within the limits of possibility that the Jesus of the gospels was acting a part and living a lie? No! it is manifestly impossible. It is utterly beyond all honest belief.

All His conduct was blameless, not only according to the standard of His time, but even according to the infinitely high standard of His own teaching. The most careful scrutiny fails to detect a flaw in His life and character, so that if His claim of divinity was a pretense, it was a lie proceeding from the purest, noblest heart that ever beat within a human breast. And it was a lie never repented of, and persisted in through persecution and death, by one whose hatred of sin, and whose love of truth and righteousness began a moral revolution in the world.

Should the bramble bear grapes, or the thistle produce olives, even then we could not believe that the holy principles and exalted morality of Christianity have proceeded from the teachings of a charlatan and trickster. It would be a miracle, more astounding than that of the Incarnation itself, if the purest system of morals that the mind of man

can imagine, and the holiest thoughts, and the most tender, loving and unselfish emotions that have ever had a place in human hearts, should have originated in a gross falsehood, a wretched fraud. Indeed it would be more than a miracle, it would be the destruction of all law, the annihilation of all logic, for the very statement of the hypothesis contains a self-contradiction which the mind refuses to entertain. We need not dwell on the argument. The most reckless opponent of Christianity does not now dare to impugn the motives, or to question the sincerity of Jesus. Whatever else may be in doubt, we know that He was honest and true and pure-hearted above all the children of men.

But if He was not a deceiver, is it not possible that He was deceived? May it not be, that, carried away by His religious enthusiasm, He at length came to believe that He was more than human? This is the

favorite theory of modern skeptics. They represent Jesus as a good man, one of the best and noblest of men, but, unfortunately, to some extent the victim of a delusion. At times his enthusiasm bordered on fanaticism, and so he came to occupy a false position and to imagine himself possessed of superhuman powers and divine authority.

But this theory is just as superficial and unscientific as that of His being an impostor. It is full of contradictions and impossibilities, and disregards the most evident facts of His life and the most marked feature of His character.

In an age when fanaticism was epidemic, and although He was the object, by turns, of popular adulation and opposition, He remains, under all circumstances, calm and self-possessed, His whole bearing and manner indicating no trace of fanatical extravagance.

When the multitude in their en-

thusiasm would have taken Him by force to make Him a King, He manifests no excitement, He is evidently under no delusion; but, quietly sending away His disciples, He dismisses the crowd and retires into a mountain to pray.

When James and John, in their indignant zeal, would call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritan villagers who would not receive Him, He gently rebukes them and goes to another village; and even when He breaks out in terrible invective against the Scribes and Pharisees, His words are full of the dignity and power of one who stands upon the truth and justice of His cause and is assured of the authority with which He speaks.

Indeed, from first to last, there is no faintest suggestion of an unbalanced mind or of a disordered imagination. On the contrary, all His teachings are sublime in the combined simplicity and profound-

ity of the truths which they contain.

Was that powerful intellect which laid the foundations of Christian theology and Christian life, and which now, after eighteen centuries, dominates the thought of the civilized world—was that mind, which originated the unparalleled discourses of the gospels, so bewildered and uncertain as to fall into such gross self-esteem, and such absurd vain-glory as His assumptions would involve if they were unfounded?

Did He, whose keen penetration discovered the most subtle forms of self-deception in others, Himself fall into a delusion more extravagant than any that He exposed? Did He, who rose superior to, and swept away all the superstitions of His age and country, cherish a still more absurd superstition in regard to Himself?

When He claimed to have fed the multitudes with a few loaves and

fishes, or when He summoned forth the dead Lazarus from the tomb, it is simply impossible that He should have been laboring under a delusion. And when He told the disciples of John to tell their master—"The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised," it is absolutely certain that He knew what he was saying.

Only insanity could be deluded into the belief that such things were, when they were not; and if Jesus is insane, then let us look to the madhouses for the regeneration of the world, and let us depend upon the fanatics and the lunatics for the discovery of truth.

In fact, the skeptic cannot account for Jesus Christ. On any theory which sets out with His mere humanity, He remains a strange, confusing, unaccountable anomaly. You can make nothing of Him; He is not an impostor, He is not a self-deceived enthusiast, and yet He claims the

honor due to God alone and speaks with the authority of Heaven.

But when we take Him at His word—when we admit His high claim—when we believe that in Him “the WORD became flesh,” then all is consistent and harmonious in the story of His life and work. Mystery, of course, remains, as indeed we know it must, but all contradiction disappears, and mind and heart find rest in “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

This, then, is the glorious, hope-inspiring fact of the Incarnation. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people.”

Heaven bends to earth, and Heaven’s King becomes our brother, that we, through faith in the Son of God, may realize that we also are sons of God, and thus be lifted to a new and noble position; a position of dignity and peace even now, and bright with promised splendor in the ages to come.

It is true that the Eternal Word was ever the life and light of men. It is true that through all the centuries before the angels sang to the trembling shepherds, the Word was in the world, though the world knew Him not—giving to as many as received Him power to become the sons of God. To Him Patriarchs and Prophets gave testimony. In Him the righteous and faithful of all nations sought and found peace with God.

But, when, in the fulness of time, the Word became flesh, and, in the person of Jesus, dwelt among us, then life and immortality were brought to light, and grace and truth were manifested to the eyes of men.

Then it was made evident that man is destined to be complete only in God. And then began that new life of humanity, which is to go on expanding from generation to generation, until all shall be gathered together in one, in Christ.

V.

The Three Witnesses.



V.

PROV. ii, 1-5. *"My son, if thou wilt receive my words and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."*

WE have in these words of the wise King a very urgent exhortation to study and search out truth, and it is distinctly declared that the path of honest and diligent inquiry leads to the knowledge of God, which is the substance of true religion. Let a man cry after knowledge; let him incline his ear to wisdom and apply his heart to understanding; let him seek *truth* as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures—then, surely, without possibility of disappointment or failure, he shall un-

derstand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

It is a great error to suppose that Christianity shuns inquiry or shrinks from investigation. Whatever may have been the case at some former periods, or whatever may be the case now, in corrupt portions of the Christian church, it is a slander to assert that Christianity *itself* fears the light of reason, or endeavors to maintain its influence by withstanding the progress of science and the development of the human intellect. On the contrary, Christianity is the sworn friend of education. Christianity inspires and urges men to cultivate to the fullest extent all the powers of intellect with which the Creator has endowed them. Our religion teaches and prompts us to search out the secrets of nature and of life. It arouses the curiosity, and gives men such hints of the power and capacity of the human mind that the effect of its influence

is ever to encourage the effort to discover truth.

The church and the school go hand in hand, and the knowledge of God naturally awakens a desire to know the works of God. And so we find Christian men endowing colleges, and establishing schools, and our institutions of learning are largely filled with the children of those whose Christianity leads them to appreciate the importance of developing the mental powers. And as our religion influences men to the study of all other truth, so especially does it urge them to the study and investigation of the great truths upon which Christianity itself is based, and which it is its business to proclaim.

If the Christian religion cannot stand inquiry; if it cannot answer when it is questioned; if it has no established facts to bring forward in support of its claims—then, by all means, let us give it up.

It does not authoritatively demand a blind, irrational faith, but it seeks the assent of the reason as well as the trust of the heart. And so when men call Christianity a superstition, a priestcraft; when they represent it as the enemy of science, or as seeking to maintain its position by impeding the march of the intellect, they speak ignorantly and falsely.

The scriptures, throughout, repeat in various forms the exhortation of the text. They appeal to nature, to history, to the human consciousness, to every department of research and knowledge for the confirmation of their claims; and the whole tendency of the teaching of Prophets and Apostles, and of the Lord Jesus Himself, is to set men to the careful examination of the grounds of their faith. So far then from depending upon darkness and ignorance for its support, the Christian religion ever seeks the brightest light; and so far from being the foe of science and of

the free exercise of thought, it ever encourages the search for truth and courts the most thorough investigation of its own transcendent claims.

And this attitude of Christianity is, of itself, strong evidence that its claims are well founded; for if they are not, then it presents the absurd, the impossible spectacle of a false system, exciting a desire for truth which could only be gratified by the destruction of that system. If Christianity be false, then the men who are most deeply interested in maintaining this false system are most eagerly pursuing the very course which will expose and overthrow their error. If Christianity be false, then we have the strange fact of a vast falsehood cherishing in its bosom the suicidal principle of an eager love of truth, and yet not only living on, but developing and growing in every direction, by the very force of that principle which would naturally destroy it.

But while Christianity seeks investigation, it demands, and justly demands, that that investigation shall be *full* and *honest*. *All* the facts must be taken into consideration, and the aim must be simply to arrive at the truth, whatever that truth may be. Sneers and ridicule and sarcastic wit are not arguments, and fierce assaults upon detached passages of scripture, or upon solitary facts taken out of their connection are not the methods of impartial inquiry. And there is the trouble with infidelity. It *attacks* Christianity. It carries forward its so-called investigations with the avowed purpose of overthrowing "the faith." It allows this purpose to sway its judgment of all facts, and so is utterly unfair and unscientific in its criticism.

Let us now look at the facts of Christianity, which the inquirer must face—I mean the great, undeniable facts which stand out before every

intelligent man with such prominence that they cannot be ignored. These facts are, first: The Book—the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Second: The Person—Jesus, the Christ. Third: The Institution—the Christian Church in its historical development. Our claim is, that these facts can only be accounted for by the further fact of a personal God—*revealed* in the Bible, *incarnate* in Jesus Christ, and still *present* and *efficient*, by the Holy Spirit, in the Christian Church.

And the inquiry is, can these facts be accounted for in any other way? Can any rational and adequate explanation of them be given, if a personal God be denied and the supernatural be excluded?

1st. The Book—a book which is entirely unique in all the literature of the world. It is, indeed, a literature in itself, rather than a single book. Written by nearly fifty different authors, through a long period

of fifteen hundred years, under circumstances as widely different as a king's throne and a prisoner's dungeon—with a marvelous variety of style, and each writer having his own special and immediate object in view—it is yet *a unit* in its grand purpose, and all its teachings converge upon one central point and illustrate one prevailing theme—the Salvation of Man from the power and punishment of sin, through the limitless love and the stupendous sacrifice of a personal Lord and Deliverer, who is at once the seed of the woman and the Son of God. This is the thrilling subject of the whole book, from Genesis to the Revelation. It is with this momentous topic that the history, the poetry, the prophecy, the legislation of the Bible are concerned. And the most hostile criticism, the most thorough and exhaustive examination by the keenest scholars in all the centuries has failed to establish

contradiction or inconsistency in any material point in this astonishing book. Now, how can this fact be explained? How is it that Moses, who lived fifteen hundred years before Christ, and wrote for a tribe of enfranchised slaves, wandering through an inhospitable desert; and David, who lived five hundred years after Moses and wrote for a civilized and well-organized nation; and Zechariah, who lived five hundred years after David and wrote for that nation in the time of its humiliation and captivity; and Paul, who lived five hundred years later still, and wrote for gentile as well as Jew, for all classes and conditions of men, and with a far-reaching *forward* intention toward generations yet unborn—how is it, I say, that *now*, more than three thousand years after the first of them was penned, and more than eighteen hundred years since the last of them appeared—how is it that all these so various writings are

bound up in one volume, forming a perfect and consistent whole, so complete and symmetrical, so manifestly *one* in design and teaching that the majority of people never think of them except as one book, and all speak of them as *The Bible*? And furthermore, how is it that now, after all these centuries, and amid political and social and religious and literary circumstances, altogether new and undreamed of by its writers, this Bible is still full of vigor and freshness and practical application to human need?

And the wonder grows, as we consider the amazing influence which it has exercised and still continues to exercise over the minds and lives of men. Translated into more than two hundred languages, and scattered over the whole earth in millions and millions of copies, it is eagerly read and pondered in the hovel and in the palace; studied with absorbing interest by the acutest

minds, the most profound and accurate scholars the world has known; and commented upon in many thousands of volumes of learned exposition, it has also been the loved companion and unfailing friend of the ignorant and humble.

The sorrowing have been comforted; the tempted have been strengthened; the erring have been brought back to virtue; the young have been inspired to seek noble ends; strong men in the thick of life's battle have been armed to resist evil; the aged have had the lingering days of infirmity made bright and peaceful; the dying have been enabled to triumph over all the terror of the grave, by the words of this incomparable book. And that, not in exceptional instances and under peculiar circumstances, but through many centuries and in all lands where the Bible has found its way. And to-day, in the midst of the much boasted light and progress of this nineteenth century,

this ancient book is more widely read, more carefully studied, and more practically and powerfully influential than ever before.

Certainly all this constitutes a fact which has no parallel. It is a unique fact, which the inquirer must face, and for which he is bound to give some adequate explanation. We Christians say, in the language of the Bible itself, that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We hold that the supernatural influence of the Divine Spirit enlightened the minds and guided the thoughts and expressions of these writers, and so their unity and consistency are the unity and consistency of absolute and divinely revealed truth. And the astonishing and beneficent power of their words is due to the efficacy of the Spirit that underlies them. In a word, it is God's Book, and *hence* its peculiar position in the literature of the world.

Now, if you reject this theory, if you refuse to accept this explanation, how will you account for these facts, under what natural laws will you group them? There is no other book, or set of books, in any degree like the Bible. The sacred writings of other religions can no more be compared with this book than oil-lamps and tallow candles can be compared with the sun in the Heavens. These can be, and have been, accounted for in their origin and development and influence, according to well-known laws of human nature, but although all along, from age to age, unbelievers have been trying to account thus for the facts connected with this book and its history, they have utterly failed. The theories of one infidel have been shown to be absurd by the arguments of another. Indeed the only rational and adequate account of the origin and power of the Bible is that which the Christian gives

when he calls it *The Word of God*.

The second outstanding fact which confronts him who would inquire into the claims of Christianity, is the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The undisputed, the indisputable particulars of his life and character are, in brief, these:

He lived in Galilee, an unknown, unnoticed Jewish peasant, until he was about thirty years of age. He then appeared in public as a teacher of religious truth, and very speedily attracted the attention and excited the interest of all classes of the people throughout the length and breadth of Palestine. For about three years he continued his work, going from place to place with a small retinue of plain men, fishermen and tax-gatherers, and in the synagogues and in the streets, by the roadsides and on the seashore, on the mountains of Galilee and in the temple at Jerusalem, he quietly and simply gave utterance to the

most profound truths which the mind of man is able to contemplate; solving questions over which philosophers have puzzled for ages with a few words, so plain that a child can understand them, and in such a tone of calm assurance that it is evident that in his mind there was no doubt or hesitation. And these plain and forceful words fall upon the ear to-day as freshly as when they were first spoken.

He *claimed* to be the Son of God and the Judge of the World.

He claimed perfect holiness for himself, and the power to deliver others from sin. He claimed to work miracles, and by a word to heal the sick, to restore sight to the blind, to give hearing to the deaf—even to raise the dead to life. The honors which most men seek, he refused, even when they were pressed upon him, and led an humble life of poverty and toil, while he rebuked the eager desires of his

followers for the earthly success and prosperity of his mission.

He declared that his kingdom was not of this world, but he also declared that it should ultimately include the world, and that it should continue for ever. The morality he taught was the highest and purest imaginable, and his own life did not, in any particular, fall below his doctrine. At times he was very popular, and multitudes followed him admiringly, and would have been glad to put him at their head in an insurrection against the Roman power.

But at last, having disappointed the carnal expectations of the people, and roused the bitter enmity of the ecclesiastical rulers by his fearless denunciation of their greed and hypocrisy, he was betrayed by one of his own disciples, and put to death by crucifixion as a blasphemer and a traitor.

Before his death he had told his

disciples that he must soon be killed, but that he should rise again the third day.

This declaration they seem not to have understood at the time, but afterwards they believed that he did rise; they believed that they saw him and talked with him, and that finally they beheld him pass away through the clouds into Heaven. And this their belief was so strong and confident and precious that, to maintain it, and to persuade others of its truth, they willingly gave up every worldly interest, and exposed themselves to ignominy and persecution and death.

Such, in brief outline, are the facts of Christ's life, which all must admit. Not one of them can be successfully denied, for they are as indubitably a part of authentic history as the story of the French Revolution or the life of George Washington. The question then is, What will you do with these facts? What rational account will you give of

them? The Christian, of course, asserts that the words of Christ were true, that His claims were well founded, that He is indeed the Son of God and the Divine Savior of men, that He is God manifest in the flesh, that He is risen from the dead, and that the disciples did see and talk with Him after His resurrection, as they claimed.

But if you say that this is not scientific, that science cannot admit the supernatural, then you must substitute some other more satisfactory, more scientific explanation of the facts. And with this problem infidelity has of late years been very busy. The most elaborate, ingenious and complete attempts to account for the person of Christ are those of Strauss and of Renan. But who believes now that either of them is a true theory? They are so full of contradictions and absurdities that the intelligent enemies of Christianity can get but little comfort from them.

And still the facts are unaccounted for. Still the question remains unanswered—"What think ye of Christ?" Do you say, "he was a good and great man, an earnest reformer, and a teacher of truth—that is all"? But that does not, by any means, settle the matter, for now your answer must be questioned in the light of all the facts: You say he was a great and good man. Ah! but *he claimed* to work miracles. You say he was merely a reformer and a teacher of truth. But he claimed to raise the dead, and that he himself should rise, and that he should sit upon the throne of the Universe and judge all nations. "Well," you answer, "he was visionary and enthusiastic in these things and fell, of course, into some errors and extravagances." But is it conceivable that one so remarkable for self-possession and calmness, for practical wisdom and shrewd common sense—is it con-

ceivable that one whose words are the clear expression of the most profound and far-reaching truth should have been the subject of such vulgar delusions?

If it be true that He who preached the Sermon on the Mount, and told the story of the Prodigal son, and uttered the Lord's Prayer and lived the life of gentle, loving purity recorded in the gospels—if it be true that the Jesus of history *imagined* that He raised dead people to life, or that He fed great multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, then we may as well throw away all that has ever been written on the science of the human mind; then, indeed, there is not, and cannot be any such science, for here are facts which give the lie to all experience and observation, and stand outside of any possible consistent theory.

For, notice: it is not simply that this great, strong, clear intellect was deceived into the belief that some

one else wrought miracles—that would be hard enough to credit—but the infidel theory is that this most powerful mind was constantly under the absurd delusion that he himself not only could, but actually did that which no human power can do—and that not once or twice, but hundreds of times, all through his ministry. The fact is, that the denial of the divine and the supernatural in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, involves a belief in wonders more strange and inexplicable than any of the miracles attributed to him. And the unbeliever exhibits amazing credulity in accepting the contradictions which are evident in any theory of a *merely human* Jesus.

The other obtrusive fact which must be met in any honest inquiry concerning the claims of Christianity is—the Christian Church. And the problem is to account for its peculiar origin, its unexampled career, and its present unparalleled position.

A few obscure men, humiliated and disheartened by the shameful death of their leader, suddenly become filled with an all-absorbing enthusiasm for the cause which but a moment before they deemed lost. They boldly and emphatically declare that their Lord has risen from the dead. They stake their lives upon this, and with wonderful zeal and wisdom and courage they seek to persuade all men to accept the fact and to entrust to this crucified and risen Jesus all their interests for time and eternity—and though the civil and ecclesiastical rulers oppose and persecute them, though often the people are excited to fierce enmity, yet still their numbers rapidly increase. Their influence extends north, south, east and west; until, within three hundred years, their faith, so ridiculed and despised at the beginning, has become the state religion of the Roman Empire.

And now, through eighteen hundred years this institution of the Christian Church has been growing and expanding far and wide through the earth. Threatened with destruction by the fire and sword of its enemies—assailed again and again by the most subtle and ingenious arguments of infidelity—shaken to its very center by the corruption, the hypocrisy, the treason of false disciples, manifesting often, on its human side, a folly and blindness which would have been fatal to any other institution, it not only lives to-day, but lives with a fuller life, and exhibits a more healthy and beneficent activity than at any former period of its history. Wherever its banners are carried and its teachings accepted, the most happy results are quickly seen. Morality, science, art, freedom, the family, the school, the orphan asylum, commerce, manufactures, prosperity—these are the incidental and secondary accompani-

ments of its more specific work for the salvation of immortal souls.

The civilization which is spreading among the nations, and which has in it the elements of indefinite expansion and adaptability to all races of men, is emphatically a Christian civilization. And the instrumental cause of all that is being done for the elevation of mankind, is this Christian church, built upon the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.

Now, what we claim is, that those who will not accept our explanation of these facts, that those who will not admit *the supernatural* in the history of the church, shall account for the facts in some other way. And here again, after all the attempts that have been made, the problem remains unsolved by infidelity. Gibbon tried to solve it historically, and Leckey tried to solve it philosophically, but their positions have been proved untenable, and their

theories do not cover the facts in the case. And what Gibbon and Leckey have failed to do, men of less learning and less ingenuity certainly will not accomplish.

Facts are persistent and indomitable, and they can be neither sneered nor ignored out of existence. And **these* facts of Christianity—these facts which cannot be denied—the Bible, Jesus Christ, the Christian Church, stand forth as the most prominent, the most obtrusive facts of human life and history. Vague talk about the power of superstition and the general credulity of men, will not explain them, neither are they scientifically accounted for by ridiculing the story of Jonah and the Whale. These facts are too vast and too conspicuous to be disposed of in any such way. In truth, the more diligently we study them, the more thoroughly we investigate them, the less satisfactory, the less adequate does any *natural* explanation of them appear.

The Bible is itself a greater miracle than any that it records; and Jesus Christ is a greater miracle than any that He claimed to work; and the Christian Church is a greater miracle than any that are said to have occurred in its history.

And so we come back to the point from which we started, and unhesitatingly assert that what Christianity especially seeks is *light*—LIGHT!

Our holy religion asks of the world a full, thorough, honest, searching, scientific investigation, and the brighter the light the more glorious will her heavenly truths appear.

Let no man fear the future. No matter what storms may gather—no matter what foes may arise—no matter how many scoffing infidels may oppose themselves—the church of the Living God will move onward in majestic progress to complete and universal triumph.

The old, old faith by which the apostles lived and the martyrs died

—the old faith of Augustine and Anselm and a’Kempis—the old faith of our fathers and mothers—will yet live and grow older and older, and still its youth will ever be renewed, and our children, and our children’s children shall rejoice in the blessings it brings. As it has taught us the way of life, and brought to our souls the sweet peace of pardon; as it has united us in tender love with Jesus our Savior; as it has strengthened us in the hour of temptation and comforted us in all our griefs; as it illumines our souls with the glad, bright hope of Heaven—so will it continue to do for countless generations yet unborn.

The truth as it is in Jesus is the Eternal Truth of God.

VI.

The Experimental Proof.

VI.

PSALM xxxiv, 8. "*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*"

IN the Christian religion everything turns on *faith*. Christ Himself tells us—"He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." Paul declared faith to be the one essential condition of salvation, as when he says to the jailor of Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

It is true that the Scriptures also insist upon the necessity of good works and righteousness of life, and teach, with utmost plainness, that without personal holiness no man can see the Lord.

But this two-fold teaching does not involve any contradiction or

inconsistency, because virtue and benevolence and all the qualities of holiness form a *part* of that salvation of which *faith* is the only condition. They are results of faith just as certain as the pardon of sin and admission to Heaven.

When a man sincerely believes in Christ he becomes good, and his goodness is a part of his salvation, and a most necessary part. Indeed there is no salvation of which goodness does not form a part. So that no matter how emphatically a man may assert that he believes in Jesus, if his life is persistently evil, we know that he is deceiving himself and that he has no true faith. If an evil-living man is counting on pardon and the joys of Heaven on the ground of his faith in Jesus, he is cherishing a false hope, because his want of personal righteousness shows that his faith is not genuine—that it is not effecting, and cannot effect, his salvation.

Still, salvation by faith, and by faith *alone*, is the great central doctrine of Christianity; everything else turns on this, so that the one urgent exhortation which is ever on the lips of the preacher of the gospel is just this—*Believe! Believe!* Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved—saved from sin first, and then from that misery which is the consequence of sin. We go into all the world and to every creature, we proclaim the good news of a free salvation, and he who believes is saved, and he who refuses to believe is condemned, “because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

And right here, at this central point, is the difficulty with many who are not Christians. They say, “Such a condition of salvation is not fair, because one’s beliefs are not under the control of the will. One cannot, therefore, be held responsible for his beliefs. I have looked

into this matter and my mind is not convinced, and consequently it is out of the question for me to believe. It is all very beautiful, and it would be very pleasant to know that it is all true, but I honestly do not and cannot believe it. Why should I be punished for what I cannot help?"

Now let us consider whether this position is sound or not—whether, indeed, it is a fact that the unbeliever *cannot* believe:

Beliefs are sometimes produced by arguments addressed to the understanding, sometimes by the testimony of men upon whose intelligence and honesty we rely; but the scientific method of experiment is the method which in these days is especially relied upon to reach conviction and certainty.

Now to my mind the philosophical argument for the truth of the Christian religion is simply conclusive. The process of reasoning by which it can be shown that the

church is a divine institution; that the Bible is the product of inspiration, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, appears to me to be sound, logical and unanswerable. But to you it does not seem so. You have considered the arguments for and against Christianity, and you are convinced that the church is a merely human society; that the Bible is *not* the Word of God in any special sense, and that Jesus was self-deceived, and from these arguments, you say that you can come to no other conclusion.

So, again, the testimony of Christians would be enough to satisfy my mind of the truth of our religion. Myriads of men and women, of high intelligence and undoubted honesty, in every age of the church, have asserted that God has revealed Himself to their faith; that they have had experiences which make it impossible for them to doubt. Their

testimony is like that of Meyer's St. Paul--

"Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest,
 "Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny :
 "Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
 "Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

"Rather the Earth shall doubt when her retrieving
 "Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,
 "Rather than he for whom the great conceiving
 "Stirs in his soul to quicken into God.

"Ay, though thou then shouldst strike him from
 his glory,
 "Blind and tormented, maddened, and alone,
 "Even on the cross would he maintain his story,
 "Yes, and in hell would whisper, I have known."

Their hearts, their desires, their purposes, their whole lives have been changed under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and it is an influence of which they have been and are perfectly conscious. But while to me this evidence is perfectly convincing, in your mind, perhaps, it does not produce conviction. You believe that these people are mistaken, that

they are self-deceived, that the results which they attribute to supernatural causes and divine influences are really due to causes perfectly natural, and so you cannot receive their testimony.

And "Now," you say, "what more can I do? I cannot force my mind to accept that which my reason rejects." True, but neither can I go back of my Master's words, "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned," and yet I am perfectly sure that not one single individual in all the universe will ever be condemned for what he cannot help.

The fact is that you are mistaken when you say you *cannot* believe. You *can* believe, if you will take the necessary steps to reach belief.

I do not mean that you are to go deeper into the argument for Christianity, although I doubt whether you have quite exhausted that method of inquiry. Nor do I mean that

you should reconsider the force and significance of the testimony of believers, although the probability is that you have not given that testimony its due weight. But I do mean that you should adopt the plan suggested in the text, which, after all, is the only method by which any true saving faith can be acquired.

TRY Christianity. Test it by personal experiment. "O taste and see that the Lord is good." There is really no other way of getting at the bottom of it. Argument and the testimony of others are, indeed, of great value: they confirm the wavering; they strengthen the weak; they lead the hesitating to try the experiment. In the minds of infidel and skeptic they awaken doubts as to the validity of their doubts. But they can never produce a living faith. Even if you were fully convinced in your reason that all that the Bible contains is the very truth of God, still, unless you are able to say, "I

have tasted and seen," you have no real faith.

Just here, then, is where your responsibility in this matter of faith comes in. Is it honest for you to say that you cannot believe until you have used every possible means to acquire belief? And yet, as a matter of fact, the one only proper and sure method, the straight-forward, common-sense, scientific method you have utterly neglected.

Christianity is not merely a philosophy, a theory to be accepted or rejected by logical argument. It is a mode of life, a principle of conduct, to be tested by experiment. And if you do really desire to believe, is it not foolish to refuse to make the experiments by which alone a true and saving faith can be reached?

And this leads us to notice that the exhortation to "taste and see" has an equal application to many who are not thorough unbelievers,

but who accept intellectually the essential doctrines of Christianity, and acknowledge the supernatural origin of the Bible and the divinity of Christ, yet hold back, hesitating, refusing to become Christians, because there are details which they do not quite understand, and because there are some doctrines which they can hardly believe.

When conscience urges them to turn to Christ for salvation, they set to work first to argue away their doubts, and to get their theory of religion all complete and consistent before they will accept the offered mercy, or declare themselves on the Lord's side. One says: "I would like to be a Christian, but I do not understand how there can be sin in a universe created and governed by an infinitely holy, wise and powerful God." And he thinks he must solve that mystery before he can be a true Christian. Another cannot satisfy himself in regard to the doctrine of

predestination, and he will not trust Christ as his Savior until that matter is settled. A third stumbles at the doctrine of eternal punishment, and will not go a step further until that obstacle is removed. They stand and argue and debate and object, as if their Christianity depended upon the clearing up of all those dark and mysterious subjects.

To all such the text speaks, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Stop talking, stop arguing, and put God to the test. Try the experiment, and you will soon believe all that it is *necessary* for you to believe; and your belief will not be a dead theory, but a living and life-giving principle which, under the Spirit's leading, will, in the end, include all truth. While even now your experiment will bring peace to your soul and make your whole life nobler and more worthy.

We now come to the important, practical question—How are these

experiments to be made? What tests can we properly apply to Christianity in order to discover by personal experience whether it be true? Of course we must be careful to test Christianity as it really is in the Scriptures, and not as it is in our notions.

When the Jews demanded that Christ should give them a sign from Heaven, that is, that He should produce some wondrous spectacle in the sky, they were applying no proper test to His claims. He was not a mere wonder-worker. His miracles were all wrought to illustrate and enforce spiritual truths, and when they clamored for a mere wonder to impress their senses, they were not testing Jesus according to what He claimed to be, but according to their own unworthy and carnal notions of what the promised Messiah should be and do. So, also, when Professor Tyndall suggested that the utility of prayer should be tested by all the

churches praying for a certain thing, to see whether it would be granted, he simply displayed his ignorance of the Christian doctrine of prayer—of its nature and use, as taught in the Scriptures. His proposed test would have proved nothing, one way or the other, in regard to the real value of prayer. It would only have illustrated the folly of Professor Tyn-dall's notion of prayer. A notion which is no less foolish and unscriptural because, unfortunately, many good Christians seem to hold and advocate it.

And so in regard to Christianity as a whole, if you were to demand that the Almighty should write a declaration of its truth on this wall in letters of fire, that would be no proper test at all, for Christianity has never pretended that anything of the kind would ever be done. And, if it should be done, it would prove nothing as to the real value and efficacy of our religion—it would

have no power to convince a single mind of any spiritual truth; or if you demand that worldly prosperity and success should be the results of becoming religious, and decide that religion is a delusion because these results do not, in many instances, follow the practice of piety; or if you insist that God should make you perfect and sinless before you will believe His word or put your trust in Him; these experiments would be utterly worthless, because utterly inapplicable. You would be merely testing your own preconceived idea of what God ought to be, and of what Christianity ought to effect, and not at all the God and the Christianity of the Bible.

Still another wrong and unwarrantable test, which many will insist upon applying to Christianity, is this: they require that the Spirit of God should so work upon them as to produce some sudden and overwhelming excitement of the feelings,

and they demand that before they yield to Christ their faith and obedience, they shall be made conscious of some mystical supernatural influence, which shall bear them along as on a flood toward God and truth. And since this proof is not given them, they will not believe—they will not obey. But this is no proper test—for, while it is true that the Holy Spirit does in some instances manifest His presence and His power in such manner, as in the case of the Apostle Paul, yet far more frequently it is through the ordinary operations of the mind and in the common events of life, and by the clear teachings of the Bible, that He speaks to the human soul and leads it to submit to His heavenly guidance. And surely we may not demand of Him a method of conversion which He has not promised to follow.

But now let us look at some of the tests which *may be* legitimately

and effectually applied to Christianity.

It is recorded that when Jesus was on the earth, He gave this invitation and made this promise—"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." And to this day Christianity makes much of this, and asserts distinctly and confidently, staking its truth upon the assertion, that any man who will go to Christ and ask His help will find rest and peace for his soul. Now, you have sins that burden you. Does not conscience often remind you of them? Do they not at times lie heavy on your soul? You cannot, I am sure, think peacefully and joyfully of the hour when you must stand before your Maker and give account of the deeds done in the body. The thought of judgment, and of the dark uncertainty that shrouds the future, oppresses you with a vague feeling of dread. Here, then, you

may test God. Now you can try Christianity, and find out for yourself whether it be true. Go to Jesus Christ with all your weary burden. Go, even if you are *not sure* that He can hear you or help you, and cry—"O thou that takest away the sin of the world, take away my sin," and if you *mean* it—if you are willing to part with all the sweetness of sin as well as with its bitterness—then, if there is any truth in our religion, that prayer will be heard, and you will soon be able to exclaim, in the assurance of a triumphant faith, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*"

Or you have sorrows that are heavy to bear. They have no element of brightness or hope in them, but they darken all your life with their deep, unintelligible misery. Now you can apply the acid and see whether the shining metal be indeed pure gold. Take your heavy-laden soul to Jesus Christ, and plead His promise, and ask for light and com-

fort, and then, if Christ be true, you will find rest. And even in your sore affliction you will discover a wise and loving purpose. Through the mist of your tears you will recognize your Father's face, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will *keep* your heart and mind.

Again, Jesus declares that the Heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. And He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Now, do you really desire to believe? Would you indeed be convinced? Would you know the truth of this Savior? Then make the experiment. Ask for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you. Purify your heart. Walk in the ways of holiness. Aim steadily at truth in speech and conduct. Set about a life of careful obedience to the precepts of the Bible; and then, unless Christianity is a falsehood and a failure, you

shall see God—you shall come to a clear, trusting, confiding knowledge of Him. The twilight of doubt, nay, the very night of unbelief, will become the bright noonday of assured faith.

These and such as these are the proper practical tests by which to try Christianity. In this way you may “taste and see that the Lord is good.” And not until you have thoroughly and faithfully made these experiments and found them to fail, can you honestly claim that you *cannot* believe in Christ. If the arguments for Christianity do not convince you; if the testimony of Christians to the reality of their experiences is insufficient evidence for you; yet this method, this best and only sure method, still remains. Taste, and you will see that the Lord is good.

Some of us have made this personal trial of Jesus Christ and His promises, and now we believe, not

because it is reasonable, not because we have been told by others, but because we have experienced His love and His truth. Our experiment has been successful and satisfactory. Now, will not *you* make the trial?

Is it not the part of a wise man, is it not the part of a fair-minded man, to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good?

VII.

Sin.

VII.

1 JOHN iii, 4. "*Sin is the transgression of the Law.*"

SIN is an ugly word and stands for an ugly thing. It is not a pleasant or attractive subject to contemplate. To drag out into the light and hold up to view, to look at and meditate upon the sinfulness of the human heart, and all the horrid consequences of that sinfulness, is by no means an agreeable occupation. And because it is not agreeable, many people object to its being done under any circumstances.

Why not dismiss so gloomy a subject? they say. Why give it any prominence whatever? Certainly there is present actual misery and sorrow enough in the world, without affrighting us with this grim spectre

of guilt and its ghostly train of attendant woes. The preacher should seek to make life brighter, not darker. Pleasant themes should be presented in the pulpit. The church should be a place of joy and peace. Religion should be made attractive. The love of God should be dwelt upon. His fatherly goodness and tender pity should be set forth with emphasis, and only those subjects that are calculated to draw and win men should be preached about.

Ah! how glad would we be if the facts of the case would warrant such a course. But, alas, they will not, and the minister who adopts that pleasant theory as the plan of his ministry is recreant to his duty, disloyal to his Master, and unfaithful to his people.

It is our *business*, as ambassadors of the Great King, to speak from the Word of God concerning the life of men; and since both the Word of God and human life are full of this

subject; since it is the most conspicuous fact in human experience, and the Bible refers to it on every page, certainly, if we leave out sin and its punishment, we cannot be true to our commission.

And, besides, if we do shut our eyes to these facts; if we refuse to consider them; if we succeed in dismissing from our minds all the painful thoughts, the fears and misgivings to which they give rise; we do not in this way obliterate the facts. We do not get rid of sin. We do not escape its punishment. We are simply like the debtor, who has not the moral courage to examine his accounts, and who, rather than think about the disagreeable subject of his debts, allows his affairs to run to still greater confusion, and to final and irretrievable ruin. Or we are like one afflicted with some secret disease, who refuses to call in the physician, or to take any medicine

because it makes him unhappy to be reminded that he is sick.

To avoid the consideration of facts, simply because they are painful or disquieting, is weak and cowardly, and it does no good.

Moreover, we can only rise to an adequate conception of God's love in the recognition of our own sinfulness. We can only experience the full joy of salvation, as we realize what it is from which we are being saved.

The fair, radiant, joy-giving picture of Jesus Christ as our Savior and friend, can only shine forth in its full beauty and lustre, from the dark background of that estate of sin and misery from which He redeems us.

Let us, therefore, honestly, manfully, fearlessly, look at this terrible and universal fact, and endeavor, in the light of revelation and experience, to understand what sin is, so that we may the better know how we can be saved from it.

Many crude and incorrect notions prevail in regard to the nature of sin, and this error and confusion lead to very sad practical results.

Thus, there are those who esteem as sin only such acts as are against the law of the land; to commit murder, to steal, to forge another man's name—these *crimes*, and such as these, cover all that the word sin means to them.

Others advance a step beyond this, and include in their idea of sin all acts that are contrary to the law of public opinion, and the customs and morals of civilized life. They admit that drunkenness, impurity, profanity, lying, indeed *vices* of all kinds are sinful. But, if they avoid immorality, then they cannot be charged with sin.

Still others, having deeper insight and taking a wider view, find sin, not only in the outward act, but in the thoughts and feelings and desires of the heart, even when these are

not expressed in action. They recognize the fact that envy and covetousness, and hatred, and lust, no matter how secretly they may be hidden from the eyes of men, are in themselves sinful and corrupt, and defile the man who indulges them. And so they make it their aim to be rid of all such evil thoughts and feelings and desires, and with that they are satisfied. They say: "If we do not harbor ill will to those who have injured us; if we are not envious of those who are better off; if we keep our minds clean and innocent, surely we cannot be called sinners."

In this way men set up their own theories, and try themselves according to a standard of their own creation, and then complacently assume that they are without sin. And yet, while they thus justify themselves, they cannot altogether escape the conviction that after all they are not quite what they ought to be—not

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quite what they were intended to be. Conscience is not entirely satisfied. The uneasy question whispers itself in their hearts—"What lack I yet?"

When we turn to God's Word, when we leave all human notions and theories, and seek simply to discover what God has revealed concerning sin, we see how shallow and inadequate all these theories are. The Bible teaches us that not only are crimes and vices and evil thoughts sin, but the neglect of active practical goodness is equally sin. If we fail to do good to our fellow men; if we fail to glorify God by acknowledging Him and worshipping Him; this *failure* is *sin*. "He that knoweth to do good and doeth it *not*, to Him it is sin." It is declared that the heathen are condemned, because when they knew God they did *not* glorify Him as God.

Nor does the Bible stop here. It goes still further; it penetrates still

deeper, and discovers sin in the *absence* of certain thoughts from the mind, and in the *absence* of certain emotions from the heart. According to the Word of God, if we fail to *entertain* and *cultivate* a positive, sincere, hearty *love* for God and for our fellow men, then, no matter how devout we may be in the forms of worship, and no matter how liberal our charitable gifts may be, we are still sinners and under the condemnation of the law.

Thus we see that, if the Bible be true, though a man be not guilty of any crime; though he have no vices; though he cherish no hard feelings, no evil thoughts; though he give all his goods to feed the poor; though, in the fervor of his religious devotion, he give his body to be burned as a supreme act of worship, he may still, in spite of all this, be guilty before God—a sinner, condemned and lost.

Let us now try to see just why it

is that this must be true, and so be able to "justify the ways of God to men."

Our text declares that "Sin is the transgression of the law," or as it is in the revised version, "Sin is lawlessness"—disregard of law. But what is *the* law, the transgression or disregard of which is sin? Our Lord Jesus Himself says—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and mind and strength—this is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, namely: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now this law, thus endorsed and emphasized by Jesus Christ, is not a mere arbitrary decree, of an Almighty King. It is not *simply* a command. It is rather the statement of the rule or order of our true life. It is the revelation of the *divine plan of our existence*. It declares the method by

which, according to the original constitution of our nature, we are to accomplish the purpose for which we were created.

We find in all the works of God clear evidence that they were made to fulfill certain ends, and the scheme or plan of existence, by which each thing accomplishes the end designed, is the law of its being, impressed upon it at its creation. Thus the rivers flow in their channels, and the forests give their shade, and the orchards bring forth fruit, and fire gives forth light and heat, and the atmosphere encompasses the earth to soften the rays of the glowing sun, and all the hosts of Heaven move on in their appointed orbits; and each fulfills its destiny and accomplishes the design of its creator. Each *thing* in the universe is under law, and obedient to law, and exists only according to the *plan* of existence ordained for it from the beginning. And it is in

consequence of this obedience to law that we have the sublime and beautiful harmony of nature, all things working together in perfect accord. For we know that all apparent conflicts and contradictions in the material universe; all the so-called strife of the elements; all the fickleness of the winds; all the eccentricities of meteors and comets, are very different, indeed, yet really harmonious notes in one grand chorus of praise to the Creator and Ruler of all.

From that far-off beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, all things have thus followed, unswervingly, the law of their being, and till the earth shall be consumed and the heavens rolled up as a scroll, all *things* will and must continue in absolute perfect submission to law.

But man is not a *thing*. He is a *power*. Made in the image of God, endowed with intelligence and will,

he is able to break the law of his being; he is able to choose a plan of existence different from that which his Creator designed; he is able to disregard the original constitution of his nature. And it is this ability, this freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience, that places him in the scale of being above all created things. It is this that makes possible his immortal glory and dignity. It is this that drew from Heaven the Son of God to die for his salvation.

As we have seen, the great primal, fundamental law of man's existence is *love*—a law which could only be arranged for beings capable of disregarding it. Men were made to be in conscious intelligent harmony with their fellowmen; not simply to abstain from injuring one another; not simply to bargain and traffic with one another; not simply to live together in outward intercourse; but to recognize and live in accordance

with the fact that all their highest interests are common interests; to see in every other member of the human race a brother and to treat him as such; to feel and to manifest an active practical affection for all men; to seek, each one, not his own, but the things of others. So, too, men were made to have conscious fellowship with God their Creator; not simply to live on His bounty, and to depend upon His goodness; not simply to obey in outward act His decrees, and to speak His praise with the lips. But they were made to enter into His plans; to sympathize with His thoughts; to rejoice in His holy purposes; to love what He loves; to hate what He hates; to delight in all His will; to give love for love.

This is the design of man's creation, and this is the plan according to which his chief end is to be attained. And what a glorious plan it is. Think of the countless mill-

ions of all generations living from age to age in perfect love and harmony with each other; filling the earth with the sweetness of universal peace and brotherhood; all human tongues musical with words of pure affection; all human activities fragrant with deeds of unselfish kindness. Think of this harmonious, united humanity, together with the principalities and powers, the angels and archangels, the spiritual intelligences that throng the heavenly places, all held in one by a common sentiment of supreme absorbing affection for the Eternal Author of their being; the God and Father of all.

Such is the ideal of human existence. Such is the *law* for man. And now is it not evident that anything in man's will, in his desires, in his conduct, that tends to interrupt this harmony; anything that is not in strict accordance with this *law* is *sin*? For *sin* is the transgression of

the *law*, and the law for man is *love*, and so any thought, or word, or act, in disregard of love, is and must be sin. Not crime alone which violently assails another's rights and happiness, and openly flouts the divine command; not vice and immorality alone; not evil thoughts and corrupt passions alone, but selfishness, mere passive indifference to God and our fellow men is lawlessness, and therefore sin.

Indeed, we may go still further and see that this neglect of the law must necessarily result in misery. Because we have this wonderful power of transgressing the law of our being, we do not, therefore, dethrone God, we do not escape the reign of law. There is another law that supplements the one we have broken and revenges it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And under the operation of *this* law we bring ourselves, when we rebel against the law of love. And this

also is no arbitrary decree. This also is the statement of a natural and necessary sequence, resulting from the very constitution of the soul. It is the declaration of a principle, without which the universe is unthinkable. By way of illustration, think of the solar system in the intricate yet beautiful harmony of its movements. Think of the planets, with their attendant satellites, their moons, their rings, each revolving on its own axis, and all, in their respective orbits, circling about the central sun. Obedient to the law of their being, they act and react upon one another through the ages, fulfilling their destiny, and suggesting to the poetic mind the music of the spheres. But now imagine one of these worlds, suddenly endowed with self-will and the power of choice; imagine it refusing to revolve any longer on its axis, refusing to remain in its orbit, refusing to be obedient to law—does not science

teach us that it would immediately come under another law, even a law of destruction? Do not we know that it would but plunge itself into ruin and desolation?

Or, to come nearer home, we know in our own experience what disastrous effects result from the disregard of law. Thus it is a law of our *physical* life that we should breathe pure air, and we know that if, in transgression of this law, we take into our lungs certain foul and poisonous gases, then our lungs will be destroyed, or their functions suspended. So, again, it is a law of our *mental*, our *intellectual* life, that the mind grows strong and vigorous by the contemplation of truth, by occupying itself with pure and noble subjects of thought; and we know that if, instead of obeying this law, we keep before the mind falsehood and error, if we indulge impure and licentious thoughts, our intellectual faculties soon become enfeebled and

corrupt, and often imbecility or madness is the final result of such disregard of law. And we also know that no human power can change these laws or prevent these results.

And now, in view of these facts, is it not certain that the transgression of this *highest* law of man's *spiritual* being must lead to results proportionately disastrous? Is it not certain that the disregard of this law of love, by which alone we can accomplish our true destiny, must produce confusion and misery in our souls, and end in desolation and death? This is the teaching of reason. This is the warning of conscience. This is the plain, explicit declaration of the Word of God.

Such is our lost, hopeless condition. We have disregarded the true plan of our life. We have set ourselves against the design of our creation. We have broken the LAW OF LOVE, and so we have come under the law of wrath and destruction.

From the operation of this law no human strength can deliver us. No man; no angel or archangel; no wisdom less than the infinite wisdom of God, could devise a means of escape from the awful effects of this law. But, blessed be God, a way of escape is provided. A way so simple, so plain that the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein—for “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

How Christ can save His people from their sins; how He can make us the blessed, immortal children of God, and at the same time maintain the order of the universe and the law of sin and death; how He can restore in us the law of love and life, there is not time now to consider; nor indeed could we ever in this world fully solve the mystery.

But, unless He, the purest, the noblest, the truest, the wisest being that ever trod the earth was a false, fanatical impostor; unless the myriads who have found righteousness and peace in Him have been grossly deceived, He can and will accomplish this great salvation for all who believe on Him and trust themselves to Him. "I am the way, the truth and the life," He declares; "none cometh unto the Father but by me," but "*Whosoever* cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Do you know of any other deliverer? Where is he? What is his name? Do you see any other door of hope opening before you? In what direction does it lie?

VIII.

Regeneration.

VIII.

JOHN iii, 3. “ *Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*”

A WITTY French woman once said: “My consent was not asked when I was born”—implying that the responsibility of her life and her destiny did not rest upon herself, but upon her Maker. And in this she gave expression to what is, I believe, a very common thought among men. They silence the reproaches of conscience, they quiet their apprehensions of judgment, they repel the advances of religion, on the ground that, after all, they are what God made them. They have had no choice in regard to their inherited tendencies, and very little in regard to their circumstances. And, therefore, as a man’s character and con-

duct are the result of heredity and environment, *i. e.*, as our thoughts and feelings and actions are due to qualities with which we were born, and to circumstances over which we have no control, we cannot be held responsible, and we need not worry ourselves about the future. And so repentance and faith and all this fuss about religion are idle and foolish. Let us live on naturally, according to our own bent and inclination, and the future will take care of itself.

So men talk, and turn their backs upon Christianity and the Church. But their position is utterly false and irrational, because the premises upon which they base their argument are not true to the facts.

No man is entirely the product of inheritance and circumstances. There is a third something which goes to make up the character of each individual, and that is his own personal will, or power of choice. Heredity and environment may ac-

count for, and be responsible for a great deal, but not for everything. Every man knows that his natural inherited disposition and temperament have been more or less modified by resistance or cultivation; and every man knows that again and again he has broken through or changed his circumstances, according to his own free individual choice; and so, in this margin of personal freedom, there is abundant room for responsibility. In spite of all arguments to the contrary, men know that they are responsible for many of their thoughts and feelings and actions.

But let us suppose that this responsibility is, after all, a very small matter; that man's power of will is so circumscribed and insignificant that he really is not able to do much with himself; that he really cannot make himself much better or much worse than his birth and his circumstances have made him; that in his

daily life, he is certainly unable to reach, or even to approach the standard of truth and purity and unselfishness, which his own judgment approves as his proper ideal.

This, indeed, is simply the teaching of the Bible. It is what is meant, by the statement in our "Confession of Faith," that "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation"; *i. e.*, by the sin of Adam, and the general corruption of his ancestors, each individual man has, by the law of heredity, received such a bias of his whole nature toward evil, that he is utterly incapable of leading a good and holy life. But if this be so, why is not the French woman right?—"My consent was *not asked* when I was born." And having been thus, through no choice of my own, born to such a devilish inheritance, how can I help it, and how am I to blame if I go to the devil?

It were aside from the object of this sermon to consider what the answer to that question would be, *if* there were no gospel. Whether your involuntary birth as a member of a lost and ruined race would, of itself, have involved your personal loss and ruin, is a question which, in the present connection, is of no importance. As a matter of fact, there *is* a gospel of salvation to the lost. And that gospel proclaims the possibility, for every man, of a second birth. So that, even though it be true that you have been born of the flesh, without your consent, to a corrupt, sinful nature which inclines you irresistibly toward evil, yet there is now the opportunity offered you of being born again of the Spirit of God, and this second birth is a matter within your own choice. That is, you may, if you choose, take a fresh start; you may begin life anew, with your nature so transformed and made over that

your inclinations and desires will henceforth be toward God and goodness.

In spite of the drawbacks and hindrances which result from your first birth, you will be able to advance toward the ideal of perfect manhood. And having, by this second birth, inherited the divine nature, you may know that, according to the law of heredity, you will become like God; or, as Paul puts it, "conformed to the image of His Son."

This is the gospel. This is the good news—*salvation* for the lost; *escape* for those in bondage. This is the doctrine of Regeneration—a *new* and *holy birth* for those born in sin.

Surely, then, if God has made this provision for us; if He has indeed so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life, it is evident, is it not, that, if we do perish, we cannot lay the blame upon heredity?

We cannot plead that we were born sinners and could not help it. Here is an opportunity to choose, and if we do not choose aright it is our own fault. Indeed, how can we hope to escape, if we neglect so great salvation?

If you should be thrown, without your consent, into a deep and turbulent flood, with no ability to stem the current, and in your extremity a strong swimmer should appear and offer to bring you safely ashore, would you say "No; I was thrown in here. My consent was not asked, and I have no responsibility in the matter"? Surely, since rescue was at hand and you refused it, your death would be on your own head. Or, to use another illustration: here is a man born into the world a helpless, deformed cripple. We pity him, but we do not blame him. Poor fellow; his consent was not asked when he was born; but now, suppose he were given the chance of

being made over—of being born again, with straight, strong limbs, and having this opportunity, should refuse it, would he not now be as much a subject for blame and contempt as for pity—would we not rightly feel that the responsibility of his misery was henceforth upon himself? And to us, poor moral and spiritual cripples, incapable of holiness, hampered and bound down by sinful proclivities, comes the Son of God, offering health and strength. He declares to all who are born in sin, the necessity, and therefore the possibility of a second birth by which a new and holy nature may be imparted to us.

This is the force and application of the words of the text. Very solemnly and impressively does Jesus make this announcement to Nicodemus: “Verily, verily,” He begins—an expression which He uses only on occasions of the greatest importance—“Verily, verily, I say

unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

You notice that it is an absolute and universal condition. It applies to all classes and conditions of men. He does not say, "Except an immoral man be born again;" or, "Except a vicious man be born again;" but He teaches clearly and unmistakably that every man, whether he be moral or immoral, whether he be respectable or disreputable, whether he be a murderer or a philanthropist; yes, Nicodemus himself, the eminent Jewish ruler, as well as Zacheus the publican, or the thief on the cross—every man, by reason of the very fact that he is a man, needs to be born again.

And it is an *absolute* necessity. There is no *perhaps* about it. Christ does not tell Nicodemus that it would be better for a man to be born again, or that he would probably stand a better chance of getting to

Heaven. But He declares positively and without qualification, "Except a man be born again, he *cannot* see the Kingdom of God." And so the Church teaches this doctrine of Regeneration, or the new birth, as one of the essential, fundamental truths of the Christian religion.

We do not say that a man cannot be saved unless he believes the doctrine as we expound it—that would be narrowness and bigotry; but we do say that a man cannot be saved unless he experiences the fact; and in saying that, we only say what Jesus Christ has most solemnly and positively asserted.

Having thus declared the necessity of being born again, we must now consider what, practically, this necessary experience is. And first, it is *not* simply a reformation of the outer life, an improvement in one's morals. That often takes place while the man himself remains exactly the same man he always was. Any one of a

hundred motives may lead a man to change his manners and his conduct; but that is not being born again, any more than changing one's clothes is being born again.

Neither is regeneration simply the acceptance, by intellectual belief, of the doctrines and truths of Christianity. Many a man changes his views of theology, without experiencing any change of heart. To become orthodox is not to be born again—to be thoroughly sound in all the philosophy of religion is not to enter the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the devils believe—and tremble. A change of conduct, then, or a change of belief, or both together, will not meet the condition which our Savior names, but there must be a change of heart, of the affections, of the will. There must be such a radical, deep-reaching transformation of the whole inner life, that new purposes will be formed, new desires will yearn and sigh in the heart, new

hopes and ambitions, never felt before, will begin to stir in the breast. There will be a new light cast upon everything. And the man thus born again will see all things, time and eternity, and God and himself and his fellowmen and life and death as they never appeared to him in his natural state. Above all, he will be conscious of a personal relation with the Lord Jesus Christ, which is full of peace and joy; he leaning upon the Savior with faith and love, and Christ bestowing upon him grace and salvation. In a word, he is a new man; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new. Let me illustrate: Here, we will say, is a man who has been leading a vicious, criminal life, indulging his passions, and even recklessly breaking the laws of the land. After a while he finds that his health is failing, and, besides, he is in great danger of being arrested for his crimes and cast into prison, and so,

being a man of strong will power, he determines to reform and settle down to a respectable life, and actually does reform, simply because he is convinced that it pays better to be decent. Or, here is a man too fond of his cup. He is in the habit of getting drunk seven nights in the week, and when in liquor he beats his wife and ill-uses his children, but he is a big, burly fellow, with an arm and a fist like a sledge-hammer, and some of his friends persuade him to go into training for a prize-fight. And now what a change takes place in his life. No more getting drunk for him. For weeks and months he leads an abstemious, sober life, getting himself into condition, and the poor wife and puny children think they are in Heaven. And yet it is easy to see that neither of these men has really been changed at all in his nature. The change is all outside, on the surface; the heart remains just what it was before.

But suppose that the Word of God should come to these men and their consciences should be aroused, and they should feel the awful guilt of their sin, and be led to cry to God for mercy, and the Spirit of God should awaken in them a hatred of sin and a desire for holiness, and then, earnestly seeking to be God-like, they should, by the grace of God, walk in right ways, trusting in Jesus Christ for pardon and righteousness: then they would indeed be new men—men made over, born again of the Spirit. Or, once more, here is a selfish man, moral, a church-goer, a most respectable citizen, but selfish, close-fisted. Bye-and-bye he comes to see that if he can only gain a reputation for liberality it will greatly advance his own interests, he will secure more honor and a better position and even make more money, and so he begins to open his purse and to give lavishly to this and the other good cause;

and men praise him, and wonder at the great change that has come over him; but we, knowing *why* he has become liberal, know that he is just the *same* man; that he has not changed at all. But suppose that in that selfish, worldly heart the Spirit of God had been at work, and the love of Christ in dying for him had awakened his gratitude, and the needs and miseries of his fellowmen had begun to press upon him, and the Divine Spirit had brought him into such conscious fellowship with Christ, that his strongest desire was to be like Him and to follow in His footsteps, doing good to all men as he had opportunity. If all this were the cause and reason of his unwonted liberality, then, indeed, would the man himself be changed, and we might well say that he was "born again." Thus we see that when Jesus says "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," He means something very

real, very definite; He means that, as an essential condition of entering Heaven, a man must be radically changed, *made over*, so that he is practically a new man, taking a fresh start in life, with a new, heaven-born nature.

And now we come to the important question: How is this great experience to be reached? Already this question has been really answered in what we have said of the nature of regeneration, but I think it will be well for us, even at the risk of some repetition, to answer it again at this point. *How* can a man be born again? Not by a direct exercise of will power. The will, indeed, has much to do with it indirectly, as leading up to it and in the way of submission, but no man can *will* himself to have a new heart and a holy character, any more than he can will himself to have a new body and a healthy constitution. Neither can this change be pro-

duced by reason and argument; for, though a man should convince himself, or be convinced that it were the wise and right thing for him to have all these holy desires and godly affections which mark the regenerate man, that would not effect the transformation of his nature. And certainly joining the church does not secure the new birth. One might as well join the Free Masons or the state militia, as to unite with the church for the sake of obtaining a new heart. No, the process is a far simpler one, far more direct. It is just to *ask for it*, as a free gift, from God. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is the result of a supernatural, divine influence exerted upon the heart, and God alone can accomplish it. How it is done—in what way God acts upon the soul of man we know not. “The wind bloweth where it listeth; we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is every one

that is born of the Spirit."

It is, no doubt, a great mystery—this new birth—even as the natural birth is a great mystery. There is much about it that we cannot comprehend, far less explain; but this we do know, that "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." And we know that when we believe upon Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Mediator, and in His name pray for light and peace, God always, without one single exception, answers that prayer, and His Spirit renews the heart; "for," says Christ Himself, "if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Yes; God is our *Father*, and as a father He yearns over us and desires our perfection and our happiness. And He is our Father still, even when, like the prodigal son, we have gone

away from Him into a far country, and are living without regard to His law, careless of His love. And so, because He is our Father, whenever we call upon Him, He will hear us. When we ask Him to bless and save us, He is more than willing to grant us His Holy Spirit and to lead us into all truth. And no man ever yet went humbly to God, and with earnest sincerity prayed as David did—"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"—no man, I say, ever honestly made that request of his heavenly Father and was refused. The promise is full, clear, and unequivocal—"Ask, and ye shall [receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Of course, if you do not feel the need of any change in your nature; if you are satisfied with your present condition; if you do not want to be born again, you will not ask; but if you believe the word of Christ, that

unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom of God, then go to Him, in the simple, direct way of a little child, and ask that this great work may be accomplished in you, and without fail your prayer will be answered and you will be saved.

And now, in closing, let me notice two objections which may be, and often are, made to this doctrine of regeneration. The first lies in the fact that there are many excellent, devout Christians, who have never had any conscious experience of this great change. How is it, then, that they are Christians? I have known not a few church members of unquestionable piety, who were greatly troubled by this, but the answer is perfectly simple, for often the new birth takes place so early in life that it cannot be consciously experienced, any more than the natural birth is consciously experienced. When a child is born of Christian parents, and given to God in bap-

tism, in infancy, and is brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, we have a right to believe that even from the very first its heart is changed and its earliest thoughts and feelings are under the divine influence. Or, even when this is not the case, it may be that the truth has so gradually found its way into the heart, and the Holy Spirit has so softly and silently done His blessed work, that the man has been indeed born again, but is unable to say when, or how.

The other objection may be put in this way: "If this regeneration is such a radical change of the whole nature, how comes it that there is not much *more* difference between Christians and worldly people than there is?" Well, in the first place, there is an immense, an infinite difference between real Christians and those who are not Christians, but being largely a difference in the *inner* life, in the attitude of the soul

toward God, in the feelings and emotions of the heart, it cannot always be seen, it cannot be estimated by those who judge alone from the outside. And besides, though the change is *radical*, its results are not completed in this life. When a man is born the second time, he is not born a full-grown Christian, any more than he was born a full-grown man at his first birth. The new birth is but the beginning of a new life, and that life develops gradually, as all life does. It is a growth—"first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." And though *here* we may see only the first tender shoots of righteousness springing out of the new nature, *eternity* will show the full harvest of a perfect character.

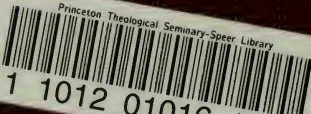
But let us not stop to argue the matter with our blessed Lord. Let us believe that He knew what He was saying, when He declared to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born

again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." If we have not yet experienced this new birth, let us earnestly and diligently seek it. If we have, let us try to show its fruits in a pure and godly life.





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